

An economy in crisis – A PM unwilling to act

When the Conservative government came to power in 2006 they were handed a budget surplus of \$13 billion and the best economic record in the G-7. It took them only three budgets of massive spending beyond their means until they brought Canada to its knees and back to what will likely be several years of record budget deficits.

It is clear now that the Conservative government knew that Canada was heading for a deficit before Prime Minister Stephen Harper called an illegal election last September before the economic meltdown. He saw that the economy was tanking and he wanted an election out of the way before the public was really hurting and passed its judgment on the poor economic management of the Conservative government.

Parliament was not even sitting when Harper called an election. According to his own legislation, an election would be called for October 2009 unless the government lost a vote of confidence in the House of Commons; a vote that never took place. When Harper introduced that law he said it was to deny the Prime Minister a political advantage on election timing – so much for accountability.

The economic troubles became even more apparent in the middle of the last election campaign. Global stock markets posted a major decline in the first two weeks of October and the severity of the economic crisis was becoming more evident.

It was clear that the economy was in trouble, however when the Minister of Finance, Jim Flaherty, introduced his economic statement in November he projected budget surpluses and economic growth for the next three years. Almost every economist did not believe the numbers the government was using.

The economic statement did not even acknowledge that we were in an economic crisis and did nothing to stimulate the economy. Instead, it was an attack on women by eliminating their right to equal pay for work of equal value. It was an attack on labour by banning the public service's right to strike. And it was an attack on all opposition parties by threatening to cut off public funding.

The opposition parties had had enough of the constant bullying by the Prime Minister and his attempts to run Parliament as if he had a majority. We realized that we needed to prove to Mr. Harper that there was an alternative that could unseat him as Prime Minister in order to ensure that he began to respect Parliament and democracy and address the needs of Canadians losing their jobs, savings, and pensions.

Rather than facing Parliament and attempting to fix the economic crisis, Harper shut down Parliament only thirteen days into the first session to avoid a legitimate vote in Parliament. At a time when countries around the world are working hard to stimulate their economies, we have had essentially no sitting of Parliament since June 2008.

On January 27th, the Conservative government introduced its budget. It was still

ideologically driven, attacking both pay equity and the collective bargaining process. It does not do enough to really stimulate the economy, and there is a large structural deficit in the budget. Most economists agree that Canada will not be out of a deficit situation in the next five years.

Personally, I would love to vote this budget down, however I have a responsibility to Canadians to do whatever I can to help them now and ensure that money flows into the economy right away. It would not be responsible to force another election only four months since the last and further delay a stimulus package, however flawed, for another five or six months. Canadians need help now.

I will continue to fight for the issues that I am passionate about including child care spaces, Employment Insurance reform, skills development and training, pay equity, assistance for seniors, affordable housing, support for our cities, and the environment.

Maria Minna