

We're a nation of masochists

Canada, to repeat the absolutely dead-on words of a 19th-century British observer, is "rich by nature but poor by policy." Things have not changed in the last 100 years.

Why this vast, wealthy nation continues to afflict itself with some of the western world's most inept and feckless politicians is a mystery to me. Though most of them hardly merit the attention of an adult mind, their works, alas, do. And horrified attention, thanks to last week's budget.

For Canada, it was the fiscal version of Dieppe. After weeks of tom-tom beating about how the government was going to get tough with the monster deficit, the result was yet another major letdown and a huge fiasco. The mountain labored and produced a mouse. A very tiny, little timid squeaky mouse of a PC government with as much political backbone as a sea slug (excuse the mixed, but appropriate, metaphor).

All the smoke and mirrors aside, spending was not meaningfully cut. Taxes are going up — outrageously. In many other nations, there would have been rioting in the streets. But not here, where being scalped and beaten by the rapacious government has become a form of national masochism. Deep cuts that should have been made in vote-buying social programs, including that sacred cow, health, were not done. All we saw was a snip here, a snip there.

Smart money traders read the budget and dumped their Canadian dollars for currencies of more reliable nations. So we are left with a \$30 billion-plus annual deficit (meaning that Ottawa spends \$30 billion more than it takes in from taxes) and government spending that is simply out of control.

Brian Mulroney, like his Liberal predecessors, never



met a vote-buying scheme he didn't like. All politicians in democracies suffer from this same weakness. But in Canada, madcap spending has become a potentially terminal disease. Something must be done before Canada becomes like those bankrupt Latin American countries.

I work 155 days a year to pay my taxes. For this, I get politicians who can't balance a budget, a post office that is the worst in the civilized world, and a military too puny to win a battle with an East Los Angeles gang. And the joy of seeing my tax money continue to flow to such worthy causes as socialist Tanzania or groups of left-wing lesbians here in Canada.

To run such a rich country as Canada into the ground takes stellar incompetence. I wouldn't hire any of our politicians to run a shoeshine stand. Politicians who do such a frightfully lousy job must be fired.

Our problem, of course, is that there is no opposition in Canada. We have long been a one-party system in which three factions, leftist, left and leftist, compete for influence and patronage money. All are dedicated to deficit spending and ever bigger government. And all three factions have proven themselves eminently incapable of governing Canada. Something must be done, quickly. The International

Monetary Fund has issued a stern warning to Canada. We are facing financial disaster and a slide into Third World status unless we bring moral order and fiscal responsibility to our slimy finances. Such is the proud legacy that Pierre Trudeau and Brian Mulroney have left Canadians.

Put government spending under an outside agency, like the IMF. Somebody has to have the guts to say NO! to Prairie farmers, Newfie fishermen or daycare advocates. Put the government under financial control of the Swiss, Japanese or West Germans, all of whom run their excellent systems with little or no deficit and paltry inflation — and still have ample social programs.

Or, more realistically, turn to a new political party, as this column has long been advocating. We desperately need a conservative party whose basic tenet is maintenance of a balanced budget and fiscal honesty. Political leaders who will tell demanding voters that there are no free lunches.

We need men like former U.S. President James K. Polk. When he ran in 1845, Polk said that if elected he would implement five unpopular but necessary policies. He refused to consider a second term so that election-eering would not sway him from his path. Polk accomplished everything he had planned, becoming quite unpopular in the process, and then stepped down.

Canada needs a James K. Polk. But Brian Mulroney, isn't him. We're stuck with credulous voters who really believe they're getting something for nothing from their pals in Ottawa. If you fish for cod, live in Quebec or attend feminist jump-ups you probably do get something for nothing. But for the unhappy rest of us who do not, government and our wretched political parties have become an enemy, not a friend.