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A new course for new times

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Before we start banging ourselves on the head over the great economic sag, one fact is worth remembering. This isn't our doing.

The recession that pummelled us in the early 1990s was, in good part, made in Canada. The recession of the early 1980s also was homegrown to a good degree.

But today's adversity was brought on chiefly by American debt and deregulation. We had neither problem. Paul Martin wisely did not deregulate the banking system like they did south of the border. And our debts and deficits were under control. We can't blame our plight on the politically-obsessed Stephen Harper government, either. Its economic management has hardly been sterling, but this recession would have hit no matter what it did over the last three years.

So, while we love to blame our politicians for everything, this time is not one. Rather than going on any guilt trips, the country should follow the lead as recommended in a report last week on the Ontario economy by Roger Martin and Richard Florida.

Stimulus schemes and handouts, they say, may be necessary to prop up the old economy. "As in all times of economic crisis, there is considerable pressure on governments to protect the past and undertake bailouts." That said, "There is a better way."

Our leaders, they suggest, need to capitalize on the current plight to drive home the need to move off the old industrial economy. Start making the big moves to an idea-driven, creative economy based not on goods, but on services. Put the stress on the development of knowledge workers, on research and development, on innovation.

That's at home. Abroad, which was not a focus of the report, there has to be a lessening of our dependence on the United States. The Harper government is finally starting to do that with Trade Minister Stockwell Day pursuing new trade agreements on other continents.

A creative economy doesn't rely on outmoded strategies at home and abroad. It requires leaders of foresight. If not Stephen Harper, the Creative Society is a vision that might perfectly suit brainy new Liberal Leader Michael Ignatieff. It moves beyond political gamesmanship and last-century methods. It charts a new course for new times.

Today's made-out-of-Canada recession should serve as a catalyst to bring it on.