

Middle East

To the Editor:

In response to I. Heritage's letter of January 18: I must first express my pleasure at finding someone who is reading the *Gazette* with the critical eye that I was attempting to encourage in my original letter.

I was disappointed by the assumption that "It is obvious

the author detested the course of action taken by the Palestinians in the occupied territories." I do not detest the actions of the more than 100 Palestinians who attempted to negotiate with Israel and were killed by their own people. I do not detest the actions of Israeli soldiers who shoot themselves rather than Palestinian protesters, as Heritage mentioned. I do not detest the actions of a friend who pleaded insanity and was institutionalized to avoid serving in the Israeli Defense Force. I do not detest the actions of most of Israel's inhabitants. The struggle in the West Bank is one of the most ignoble conflicts of the present day, and I feel for every victim of the cultural, reli-

gious and historical pressures that are tearing apart that precarious society.

Heritage's comparison between the Mossad and the PLO (and its terrorist cells) is ludicrous. The Mossad does not bomb international airline counters (Rome, Vienna) and it does not contain in its charter an article calling on all Jews to drive the Arabs into the sea.

"This wicked proposal (of censorship)" of which I was accused and which Heritage concludes "is at the moment brilliantly pursued by the Israeli military authorities in the West Bank" is much more effectively pursued by

the authorities for the 70 million Arabs surrounding Israel, all of whom have chosen forms of government that gracefully avoid democracy.

In response to Heritage's question, "How happy would the author... be in any of those universities in the West Bank which are chronically shut down by trigger-happy generals?", I answer that I would be much happier in "those (Israeli) universities" than in any others in the Middle East, where my right to attend would be questioned because of my sex, and where neither Heritage nor I could engage in such spirited debate because of the government under

which we lived.

I have lived in Israel and I can assure Heritage that one is not spared "the misfortune of reading such essays". While critical journalism is one of the privileges of citizens of any democracy (and I can assure Heritage that Israeli citizens do not neglect it), unbalanced journalism is a regrettable act. I do not condone the means chosen by the Intifada, nor those of the Israeli Defence Force. My only request, as in my original letter, is that the conflict in the West Bank and Gaza Strip is handled with deference and sobriety rather than impassioned glorification of either side.

Barbara Leiterman

o p i n i o n

What's the plan, Mr. Wilson?

by M. Asuncion

What is the Conservative government planning to do (and doing) to reduce the massive national debt of some \$320 billion?

According to the document, *The Fiscal Plan: Controlling the*

Public Debt, the Conservative government has planned interesting changes to both its revenue and expenditure strategies and policies. As well, it is hoped that revenue gains can be achieved by way of increased economic growth.

The chief objective of all these changes is debt reduction (the

reduction of the entire debt owed since Confederation) via deficit reduction (the yearly accumulation of public/government monies owed).

As mentioned, there are generally two major aspects to the plan. They are expenditure reduction and anticipated revenue increases. The Conserva-

tive government plans to reduce its expenditures by slashing several, supposedly less vital, subsidies and transfer payments. The major areas of expenditure to be slashed (for 1990-91) are:

- transfers to persons: about 215 million
- transfers to other government levels: 360 million
- major transfers and subsidies: 92 million
- major crown corporation payments: 223 million
- defence expenditures: 611 million
- ODA (Official Development Assistance): 360 million
- governmental operations: 73 million
- changes to unemployment insurance policies: 1900 million

The total decrease in expenditures for 1990-91 would be about \$3.979 billion.

The revenue side of the plan includes various elaborate changes to sales taxes (eg. replacement of the Manufacturer's Sales Tax with the Goods and Services Tax), excise levies, corporate and personal income taxes. In general, existing tax rates would be increased or brand new taxes would be imposed.

This is a very basic sketch of the 'fiscal plan,' as it were, and thus the implications of such schemes would not be obvious.

But there have been issues raised concerning such consequences. For the most part, concerning the debt reduction plan, these arguments have been based on social welfare grounds.

For example, the idea that persons earning more than \$50,000 per year should repay (at a rate of 15 per cent of net income in excess of the \$50 thousand level) their old age and family allowance benefits has been criticized by the Opposition on the grounds that it

violates a sacred tradition of universality of benefits. However, on pure economic grounds of equity, this argument may not be legitimate.

There has been ado about various other cuts such as the axing of the promised child care program (about \$6 billion). The main argument against this has been based on the accusation of broken promises.

The more recent slashing of Via Rail routes has been criticized not only on economic grounds (why not modernize to the level of the 'supertrains' of western Europe and Japan?) but also on social and environmental grounds (lost jobs, inconvenience to frequent riders, loss of national symbols, pride, increased pollution and congestion of highways due to the increase in automobile traffic).

As well, the clawbacks of unemployment insurance benefits and disavowal of federal commitment to such payments has been criticized on social grounds, as one might expect. And, of course, the proposed Goods and Services Tax has received somewhat dedicated opposition from the points of view of equity (middle income earners will lose out), efficiency (the result could be a vicious inflationary spiral due to wage demands) and administrative concerns (the tax will be an 'administrative nightmare').

Is this a good plan? This question may in fact never arise in the minds of most Canadians since it is either too complicated for the average voter who struggles from day to day, or it is simply too boring to stimulate any interest. Nevertheless, what is crucial is the big picture or the pros and cons from the overall view, something which seems to escape many of us on voting day.



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