

The Budget

• (1530)

So Canada is looking at its debt problem as it is looking at the problem of Quebec, at what for it is the problem of Quebec. I think that one of Canada's greatest weaknesses is that it looks at its problems, but never resolves them.

There is another problem in Canada as well, which the minister has failed to identify. It is a problem he raised in many speeches during the elections—the problem of jobs, the problem of unemployment. During the elections, Liberal Party material spoke of jobs, jobs, jobs. Today, there is no more talk of jobs, the word is debt, debt, debt and cut, cut, cut. The problem of the unemployed is far from the mind of the Minister of Finance.

Looking at my own region, my city, my riding, an industrial area which has been under direct attack for about ten years, all the restructuring, modernization of businesses, new technology, have left unemployed people who had worked for big business for years, earning average or even above average salaries. These people have been unemployed for a year for a lack of specific policies to help them get retrained. Now they are turning to welfare.

This budget contains nothing for the unemployed. It contains absolutely nothing to give them hope for the future. There is indeed talk of possibly reforming unemployment insurance while at the same time cutting the program by 10 per cent. There is also talk of reform providing for the unemployed to train for new jobs.

This seems to be a roundabout way of presenting minister Axworthy's famous unemployment insurance reform, a two-tiered unemployment insurance system, what someone in my region described as generous UIC and miserly UIC. Some people in Canada will have to make do with the miserly version of UIC. When I look at the finance minister's budget, it is these people I think of. What is new in this budget for the unemployed, persons on welfare, fully trained young people trying to find jobs?

Training is not the issue for young people. For young people, it is a point of fact: they are trained in leading edge technologies. Take the young people trained in technical fields at the Jonquière CEGEP, for example, they have been trained in every advanced technical area. These people should not have any trouble finding jobs because they are competent and have all the necessary training. But they cannot find jobs. Why not? Because there are no jobs.

There is no work for people looking for it. Even to restore employment to levels we had before the economic crisis, we would have to create 400,000 jobs in Canada. With those jobs, we will find ourselves where we were three years ago, and furthermore, this does not include newcomers on the job market.

I was surprised when the Minister of Finance said that Canada's two biggest problems were Quebec and the debt and that he did not mention unemployment.

Now to the budget: what is the verdict? This morning's papers ran stories on people who are happy and who say the economy will finally have room to breathe. That was the title of an editorial from *La Presse*. Before the budget, people were saying that these were hard times, that Canada was on the road to bankruptcy and that its credit rating was going to be downgraded. After the budget, people are now saying that things have improved, and accounting associations have given the Minister of Finance a mark of 80 per cent. Therefore, all is well. But who is telling us that this is because of the budget?

• (1535)

Big business, banks and brokerage houses that sell Canadian bonds, in fact, all of the people who gain from the system. They are well paid and work in a sector where the economy is well developed: the financial sector. While this sector often does not generate much wealth, it plays with it, taking a cut from it in passing. Those people are happy.

Two insights into this comment. Firstly, these people are happy because they see that the budget contains a solution to the debt problem. Curiously, a budget that appears to close certain debt-related gaps is enough to make the other problem—that Quebec is one of Canada's major problems and may scare off potential investors—disappear. They are not saying that Canada has succeeded in solving the Quebec problem, but that Quebec is simply no longer a problem. That is something I have noted.

What do ordinary taxpayers think about the budget? I have the impression that they simply feel relieved because they avoided major cuts this time. Of course, they will pay a little more for gas. Dairy producers in Quebec will see their subsidies reduced, by \$2,000 or \$3,000 in some cases. It is still a significant amount. Some taxpayers may have to pay a little more in taxes but, in general, taxpayers feel that they have avoided the worst.

But what about all the others, those who have been forgotten, that I mentioned earlier, those looking for jobs or trying to improve their socio-economic status in Canada? Those people are not praising the budget in newspaper headlines. They are not heard. They are silent.

In the last few years, Canada's major newspapers, whether in Quebec or in English Canada, have been paying significantly less attention to those people than they did in the 1970s. Probably because owners have succeeded in selling a little more their philosophy that the state should intervene less and less and let the disadvantaged and less fortunate in society fend for themselves.