

*The Budget*

● (1635)

These cuts are wrong in principle because they will cause considerable harm and pain to a segment of the population that has already been hit very hard before. I have in mind the unemployed, single mothers, older workers, the disabled, the mentally ill and others. These provisions will widen the gap between the rich and poor, will cause further social unrest and will hurt the economy by causing unemployment and reducing purchasing power.

The cuts are not only wrong in principle but contrary to what we said in the red book, contrary to what we said during nine years in opposition and contrary to what we did during twenty years in government under Mike Pearson and Pierre Elliot Trudeau.

I have the red book here. I do not have much time so I will just read one or two quotes. I could read many. I refer to page 74 of the red book. It reads:

Since 1984, the Tories have systematically weakened the social support network that took generations to build. Not only have they taken billions of dollars from health care and from programs that support children, seniors, and people who have lost their jobs, but they have set us on the path to becoming a polarized society, divided into rich and poor, educated and uneducated, with a shrinking middle class. This is not the kind of country most Canadians want to live in. In a polarized society, crime, violence, intolerance and group hatred flourish.

That is just one quote from the red book but there are many others that are similar.

I also have here the complete list of the opposition motions that we tabled during the nine years we were in opposition. Motion after motion proposes solutions which are contrary to what is being put forward in the budget.

Again, I do not have time to read them all but I refer to one put forward by the member for Hamilton East on an opposition day:

That this House regrets that almost one million Canadian children are living in poverty, that 1.4 million Canadians each year must rely on food banks and that the current recession the proposed goods and services tax will make this situation worse; and that the House, desiring the elimination of poverty in Canada by the year 2000, demands immediate programs to ameliorate the plight of the working poor, including a review of the minimum wage, discriminatory employment practices, current available children's benefits and other income support programs.

I also have the amendments that we tabled to the Tory budgets during the nine years in opposition and they state similar sorts of things.

Some people say that times were better then and we could do things when we were in government that we cannot do today. That is not completely true. The government was in better

economic shape then but the country, as the Minister of Finance said the other day, is better off today. The gross national product is higher today than it was 30 years ago. Canada is producing more goods and services. Unfortunately they are not being distributed as fairly as they should.

Some members have said, in trying to justify the budget, that being a Liberal means being flexible. One should be flexible but one should be flexible within a framework of principles. To be flexible does not mean that one completely junks all the principles that one has stood for and it certainly does not mean that one throws out the promises that one made in an election only a year and a half ago.

Yes, the red book and the election were only one and a half years ago. As far as I know there has been no significant change in Canada or in the world since that time. If the red book policy had to be changed due to changed circumstances then the case has not been made by the Minister of Finance.

● (1640)

Those are my specific concerns about the budget but I am also troubled by the longer term implications of the budget. There are several measures that continue to strip away in my view the federal government, to strip away the federal authority, to strip away the federal presence in this land, the presence and visibility of Canada as a nation.

I have in mind cuts to transportation, to communications, to the CBC and to social programs. These have always been the national glue, the national infrastructure which has bound this country together for many years. My concern is that the federal authority will be left as a hollow shell once these cuts are made.

I support the deficit reduction goal of 3 per cent of gross domestic product that we put forward in the red book. I support deficit reduction but I support it in the way that we proposed to do so in the red book: by cutting waste, by cutting unproductive expenditure, by encouraging and promoting economic growth, more jobs, more profits for business to bring about more revenue for the government and by filling in and closing down the unfair tax provisions in the Income Tax Act, not by cutting social programs. I support the goal of deficit reduction but not in the way in which we are doing it in the budget.

Yes, the fiscal deficit is important and I agree that it must be addressed. But it must not be addressed at the expense of a social deficit where we have more crime, more social unrest, more family violence, suicide, alcohol and drug abuse.

I saw a very good button the other day on a person. The button said: "If you think education is expensive, try ignorance".