

Mr. Lambert (Bellechasse): Give me a chance, and I will tell you!

Miss Bégin: —he attacked the government about the alleged terrible loss of money which he called a debt oriented budget. He mentioned the cost of servicing the debt. He does not seem to understand, unfortunately, how the money machine works: it is a business, an industry, like any other private business in which Canadians are protected against abuses. To the same extent, other businesses are not allowed to make money on people's backs by engaging in criminal activities. Looking horrified he went on to talk about servicing the debt, and insisting he does not accept a deficit budget while Canadians know full well that in hard times such as these we are going through now, we need an expansionary budget; deficit budgeting does not shock them in any way. He did not press the point and would not admit that there is no such thing as a provincial deficit budget for the simple reason that the federal government redistributes the taxpayers' money through equalization payments leaving the provinces clear of external debts, and placing the burden of national debt on the federal government. Had he made this point clear, we would have been pleased to discuss the matter.

Unfortunately, he did not bring up the subject nor any other point worthy of consideration. Neither he nor any hon. member of his party attended any of the meetings which were held with my department officials over the last few weeks, nor did he take part in the debates on the estimates. He blames the government for going into debt, and keeps complaining outside the House and presenting motions under Standing Order 43, although he knows full well no minister is allowed to give him an answer pressing the government to lower to 60 the age to qualify for the old age pension; but neither he nor any hon. member of the Social Credit party of Canada offer a suggestion as to how to finance the lowering—

Mr. Lambert (Bellechasse): Not lowering—

Miss Bégin: —to 60 the age of retirement which would automatically cost \$2 billion more a year. Everyone is in favour of it. That is not hard. But we are still waiting for the \$2 billion. We want to know where they will come from. Yet, we have not heard anything about that.

[English]

As to the official opposition, from what they have been saying up until now, all their attention is fixed on the fact that 8 per cent of the labour force is unemployed rather than on the fact that we have by far the best record of job creation in the western world. Of course, I am not saying it is acceptable to have 8 per cent of one's population unemployed.

An hon. Member: It is for this government.

Miss Bégin: No. It is not. But this government takes care of its unemployed. No one has referred to the fact that Statistics

The Budget—Miss Bégin

Canada recently released figures showing that 82 per cent of Canadians find their work enjoyable. Only 4 per cent find it unpleasant. Society is not as sick as the opposition wants us to believe.

We keep hearing of alienation, fear, insecurity and bankruptcy. The Tory party even wanted us to opt out of Canada. It is absolutely incredible.

We hear from those who have never been unemployed that our unemployment insurance program is too costly and needlessly generous. We hear it said—falsely—that in order to restore the work ethic, which in truth Canadians have never lost, we should go back to exploiting our many marginal workers for the sake of the affluence of a few. In short, I get the impression, which is far from the truth, that the quality of life in Canada is unpleasant and has deteriorated sharply over the last decade.

[Translation]

Mr. Speaker, nothing could be further from the truth, and the general thrust of the opposition's criticisms so far in this budget debate shows a lack of direction in their thinking. Incidentally, the same is true regarding many other areas, but especially in the social policy domain, the intellectual irrelevance of the suggestions heard is particularly striking.

[English]

In the six months I have been in this portfolio, I have observed that the Tory opposition has no coherent social policy. It has no comprehensive social policy whatsoever. For example, the hon. member for Brome-Missisquoi (Mr. Grafftey) proposes more welfare funding. The hon. member for Kingston and the Islands (Miss MacDonald) advocates the availability of spouses' allowance to all women between the ages of 60 and 64. The hon. member for Athabasca (Mr. Yewchuk) proposes more funding for medical research while at the same time he opposes any form of income support program. The hon. member for Dauphin (Mr. Ritchie) said that by providing the Canada Pension Plan, old age security, the guaranteed income supplement and medicare we have gone too far. What a mélange! What a social policy! At the same time the hon. member urged the government to spend more. The hon. member for York-Simcoe (Mr. Stevens), the official critic on these matters, demands that the federal government cut spending by \$2 billion. One wonders.

● (1552)

[Translation]

The general thrust of the opposition's criticisms in the social security and social policy area is that Canadians generally do not like to pay taxes for social security programs since expenses in that area are wasted money and useless. They often suggest that social programs are partly responsible for the excessively high level of government expenses, which creates an unacceptable rate of inflation.

[English]

When the opposition speaks of slashing more and more deeply into government spending they are really talking about