• (1620)

[*English*]

Mr. Jim Peterson (Willowdale): Madam Speaker, in the few years I have had the privilege of serving as a Member of Parliament in this Chamber there have been debates of great importance. One of those debates I recall so vividly was on the future of Canada itself and the question of the referendum in Québec and whether Québec would separate from Canada.

Another was one in which we talked about patriation of the Constitution and the implementation of a Charter of Rights that would put the rights of Canadians above those of any legislator, including those of us here in this Chamber.

Today, I believe we are in a debate that has very important, if not equally important, consequences for the future of our country and for the future of Canadians.

We are debating spending. We are debating a Budget. However, what makes this debate unique is the direction that this Budget has taken and the direction of this debate. We are seeing across from us a Government which has made the deficit its priority. We on this side of the House do not disagree that Canada's national deficit is of grave concern to all Canadians. The question, however, is: How does one decide to go about dealing with this particular problem?

We have two alternatives before us which I suggest to all Members of this House will determine the economic future of this country for years to come. We have before us a Budget which talks of the powers of the marketplace, the *laissez-faire* concept that corporations should be able to do as they wish. This is the concept of foreign takeovers, where Canadian firms are up for sale, even those companies we have nurtured through public money. I am referring to such companies such as Connaught, Lumonics, companies at the leading edge of technology. Yet we have said that they can be taken over by foreigners with the possibility that what we have built up here in Canada might forever be lost to us as Canadians.

We have a Budget which says that the future of Canada does not really lie in our hands. We can turn control of Canadian companies over to foreign corporations. As one Minister said, "let it happen, it is good for us".

• (1630)

These are some of the prospects we are dealing with, Madam Speaker, from the other side of the House. What have they done in terms of attempting to cope with the deficit? This again is a way we can determine the economic future of this country, for a Budget is not only a means of raising revenue, it is a way of declaring where a Government is actually putting its priorities. It is a way of determining not what the rhetoric says, but where they are prepared to spend their money. Where have they put their money?

It is pretty obvious to us, Madam Speaker, that the rhetoric is not matched by their actions. The Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) in the House of Commons just three days ago on April 28 said: "While Canada is wrestling with a very serious fiscal problem the Government is standing up for Canadians." These are the Canadians he has stood up for: seniors, who are losing part of their old age security; parents, whose family allowances are being cut; and our children who want to go to universities or community colleges. Transfer payments to the provinces are being cut. What about our younger children? The Government has reneged on its promise to create 200,000 new child care spaces. What about the homeless? CMHC has had $49 million cut from its budget. What about the sick? Transfer payments for health care to the provinces have been cut and as for the unemployed, payments to the unemployed in this country have been cut.

Nothing has been done to help the one million Canadian children who live below the poverty level. The three million Canadians now living below the poverty level can find no succour in this Budget, not one new program to help them. What has been done to help the five million Canadians who are functionally illiterate and will not be able to have full opportunities in the job market in the future? Nothing.

Look at Canada's disadvantaged regions. Regional development funding has been cut by $240 million for next year and by $400 million for the years thereafter. The Regional Economic Development Agreements have expired; they expired on March 31 to the tune of $1.6 billion and have not been renewed.