

The Budget

Consequently, I would like to warn the opposition members that if they do not set aside their separatist option and start working with this government to put Canada back to work, as a party, they will end up paying a huge political price.

Moreover, for the Leader of the Opposition to consistently refer to the rest of Canada as English Canada is an insult to the millions of francophones outside Quebec, as well as the millions of Canadians of other origins.

I had the opportunity and the pleasure to visit beautiful Quebec City and other areas in Quebec where I felt at home. They are as much part of my heritage as of any Quebecer's. Thus, I would like to invite my colleagues from the Bloc Québécois, especially those who come from Northwest Quebec, to work with us to implement our mining, forest and farm policies, extend the Ottawa seaway, and jointly develop our tourist industry, so that we can stimulate the economy and create jobs.

Let us look for what unites us rather than what divides us and together, let us put our country back on its feet.

• (1135)

Mr. Yvan Bernier (Gaspé): Madam Speaker, I want to congratulate my hon. colleague from Timiskaming—French River. I must say, however, that I do not agree fully with his comments. He speaks of sovereigntists. Well, I am proud to be a sovereigntist, but I am even more proud of the fact that our leader addressed the sovereignty issue during the election campaign. Another distinguishing feature of Bloc Québécois members is that they are realists.

The budget brought down this week is an assault on existing social benefits. We have proof of this. We have listened to our constituents and seen the impact of cuts, of lower unemployment insurance premiums, of the increase in the number of weeks of work for UI eligibility and of other reform measures which have either been announced or are being planned for them by the Minister of Human Resources Development. We are confused and worried. And we are rightly proud that we are sovereigntists and realists.

We are not trying to be divisive, to start any arguments or to score political points at the expense of Quebecers and Canadians. We have before us a budget about which my colleague spoke at greater length. I fail to see why one would seek out divisive issues. But, since we are talking about this, I would like to reiterate that the second distinguishing feature of sovereigntist Bloc members is their realistic approach in saying to Canadians: Be careful, you voted for the Liberals, the ones responsible for this budget. We have always maintained that there is very little difference between the Liberals and the

Conservatives. During the election campaign, we used the expression "six of one, half a dozen of the other".

If we had to start another campaign tomorrow morning, in referring to the difference between the Conservatives and the Liberals, I would say that the Liberals are just Tories wearing red ear muffs. That is all I wanted to say.

Mr. Serré: Madam Speaker, on one side we have the Reform Party claiming that we did not cut deep enough, while on the other side, we have the Bloc Québécois that says we were too ruthless. They want us to reduce the deficit, but they do not want us to make any cuts or increase taxes, as we did on corporations and wealthier Canadians.

A well-known Quebec comedian and philosopher by the name of Yvon Deschamps summed it up quite well when he said that what these people want is an independent Quebec within a united Canada.

[English]

I must say that one cannot have it both ways. One cannot have one's cake and eat it too.

[Translation]

Hon. Lucien Bouchard (Leader of the Opposition): Madam Speaker, governments come and go, but nothing changes. At least, that is the distinct impression one gets from the February 22 budget, once the veil of pretence has been lifted and the many statistical pirouettes have been figured out.

Yet, the members opposite claimed they had understood a few things: first, the urgent necessity to drastically reduce the federal budget to reverse the debt spiral which is spinning out of control; second, the price to pay in terms of credibility for padding forecasts for future economic progress; and third, the need for openness and transparency to win people over, as they are the ones who pay and do not appreciate being mistaken for something they are not.

There was also a fourth thing, which the government seemed to distance itself from more and more as the fateful moment to table the budget drew near. The federal government is unquestionably responsible for creating the debt spiral, and therefore the budget crisis that Canada is currently facing. Logically, it should make some sacrifices and clean up its own act.

Given that the federal government had recognized in December, at the premiers conference, that overlapping jurisdictions and policies were a problem, some were nevertheless hopeful.

• (1140)

Alas, on all four fronts, the budget is a surprising disappointment, especially since the government has, at the very beginning of its mandate, a wide-open window of opportunity, both politically and economically. Any recovery, however slight,