

Supply

The present government is playing hide and seek, when we require openness. In my speech, I would like to emphasize the collection of unpaid taxes owed to the federal government.

• (1700)

My colleagues already talked about other aspects of the motion. They talked about trimming the fat from the government. True, we could save millions by doing that, but when we talk about trimming the fat, we do not mean simply cutting jobs in the civil service. It is not true to say that all depends on the number of civil servants. If there are too many, fine, by all means cut, but I hope the cuts are going to be fairly spread among the various provinces, not made in the way recently announced by the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and Minister responsible for Public Service Renewal. If a 25 per cent reduction in spending is anticipated, I hope we will not see a 33 per cent cut in Quebec, as is expected.

That is not the only way to trim the fat from the government. To trim the fat, we could have only one bus service to take members of Parliament from their offices to the House of Commons. The same bus service could be used by members of both houses to reduce the cost. We never talked about that. Each House wants its own staff, its own accommodations, its own transportation system, its own allowances. We have two sets of everything; yet we still wonder what purpose the other place serves. However, no expense is spared.

I will not dwell on this issue any longer, because I want to come back to what I said earlier about recovering delinquent taxes. The auditor general made several comments on that topic. Most taxpayers pay their taxes when they file their income tax return or when they get a notice of assessment. But sometimes, measures have to be taken to recover, for example, unpaid balances or tax deductions at source. Also, an employer can forget to remit on time to the government the tax deductions at source. Or some taxpayers can deliberately neglect to pay their taxes.

Let me describe briefly the situation we have. Right now, there is about \$6.6 billion in delinquent taxes, that is unpaid taxes that should have been paid. These \$6.6 billion are owed by some 1.6 million taxpayers. These are the numbers we had as of December 31, 1993. Of these \$6.6 billion, \$3.6 billion were owed by individuals, self-employed workers, corporations, and include source deductions by employers.

Of that amount, \$900 million had been owed for less than 90 days. This was the case in 1993 for 21 per cent of taxpayers in arrears. And \$250 million had been owed for more than 90 days on small amounts. But \$5.35 million had been owed for more than 90 days on larger amounts. This was the case for 25 per cent of delinquent taxpayers.

Thus, of the 1.6 million delinquent taxpayers or corporations, 25 per cent, or some 400,000, representing the smallest group,

owe more than \$5 billion in taxes. That is to say that each of these 400,000 taxpayers owes a lot of tax money to the government. These are not humble and poor people. They are not people who are always in need.

On the Public Accounts Committee, we were told that we sometimes go easy on the people who have some difficulty in paying, because we do not want them to go bankrupt. We say: "We have to be understanding. Sometimes, you know, floods or fires occur. So companies are given more time to pay their taxes".

But for individuals whose income tax is deducted from their pay cheques, not even a flood will stop their employer from taking off their share of income tax and sending it directly to the government. Even if a fire destroys their home, these individuals will not be able to use the money that their employer has already deducted from their pay cheques for tax purposes. For salaried employees, the income tax is collected immediately. And for those who have different means of paying their income tax, the state is always willing to show some understanding, which gives these people an opportunity not only to take advantage of the system, but in many cases to abuse the system.

• (1705)

I think that the government must take action to give the Department of Revenue more control over individuals and corporations that owe taxes to the government. There has to be greater control if the just society that we have heard so much about in this country is to be reflected in the way Canadians pay their taxes. If we want a just society, everybody must pay their fair share of taxes. We must not have half of the population paying taxes for the other half.

I know that my time has expired. I still have a lot to say and I hope that the questions and comments period will give me an opportunity to complete my remarks.

Mr. Louis Plamondon (Richelieu, BQ): Madam Speaker, I would like to congratulate my colleague on his remarks about this motion presented for the official opposition by the hon. member for Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot. This opposition day motion clearly demonstrates how appropriate it is to warn the government of the consequences it will face if it continues to overburden low income taxpayers, the have-nots, the needy, and the unemployed, if it keeps doing what previous governments have been doing for years, and if it does not get its money where it should get it by following our ten point plan. Could the hon. member for Joliette who just spoke further explain the solutions advocated by our party, the Bloc Québécois, in order to help the government better understand public finances?

Mr. Laurin: Madam Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for this opportunity he is giving me to add a few comments. Since the tabling of the last government budget, the Bloc Québécois has gone out of its way to propose numerous solutions to help reduce the deficit. One of the first measures we recommended