

The Budget—Mr. Holtmann

position of the Government, especially the position of the Minister of Finance, in view of the very difficult situation with which we were faced when we came to power.

I must go back somewhat in history and refresh everyone's memory. Do you remember when, Mr. Speaker, things were pretty rotten in the country? I was a farmer back in the 1970s. Farmgate prices were not too bad.

I would like the Hon. Member for Broadview—Greenwood (Ms. McDonald) to stay and listen to my comments. She would want to know how things were under a Liberal administration and how they affected many of my colleagues in the House and many of the constituents I represent.

After some 22 years of Liberal Government we had nothing more than a massive conflagration of negative proportion not experienced in the modern world. It was absolutely incredible. For example, when the interest rate jumped two percentage points from week to week and sometimes into the next month, until it hit as high as 20-some per cent at the bank, there was no hope if one wanted to start a small business. Although bankers were lending a little money, it put many people in jeopardy. We must look back to see what was the cause of the devastated Canadian economy and the tremendous debt which had developed.

It started off with the now Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. Turner) when he was the Minister of Finance back in 1972. Believe it or not, Mr. Speaker, the country had a surplus of \$700 million in its current account. We have never seen that since. He started the country on a road to pure destruction, yet the Liberals managed to cling to power. When he left in 1975—and I guess he was even frustrated with his actions—there was a deficit of almost \$5 billion. When the Conservatives took power, on a yearly basis it was \$38 billion.

Mr. Attewell: And on its way to \$40 billion.

Mr. Holtmann: Yes. We must remind the Canadian public of some of the terrible things that happened in the past. Much like the wars of this nation, they must be reminded of what happened under that Government of this nation. I do not think this Party will ever let Canadian people forget. I do not think Canadians will ever forget the devastation which was caused at that time. We as a national Government are certainly doing what we can to try to bring some sense to the economies of scale and to the economies of purpose.

Under that Minister of Finance the net debt grew from \$18 billion to \$28 billion or a 50 per cent increase in only four years. That is what happened when the Leader of the Official Opposition was the Minister of Finance, the man who would like to be the Prime Minister. He is an awfully scary person to have as a leader of the country based on his past record.

Let us take a look at unemployment while he was in office. At the time he was given a mantle in January, 1972, there were 544,000 people out of work. When he left office, there were 732,000 people out of work. Unemployment under the

now Leader of the Opposition when he was Finance Minister sky-rocketed. Yet he has aspirations to lead this country.

• (1710)

An Hon. Member: What a joke.

Mr. Holtmann: Imagine how devastating that would be. Let me talk a little bit about inflation when he was the Finance Minister. He took inflation from 5.1 per cent at the time of his appointment to 10.6 per cent where it was at the time of his resignation. He finally got fed up with it all and resigned. That is what he did, he resigned. During that period the New Democrats supported that action of our now Leader of the Official Opposition. Let me tell you just what that inflation rate meant. During the Leader of the Opposition's term of office as Finance Minister prices rose in total by 38 per cent for food, 61 per cent for housing, 32 per cent for clothing, 24 per cent for health, 32 per cent for personal care and 31 per cent for transportation costs. All these things increased under the now Leader of the Official Opposition, but he wants to lead the country.

When the Budget of the Minister of Finance was presented, a very interesting thing happened. I have an editorial from the *Winnipeg Free Press* here. I can assure you, Mr. Speaker, that the *Winnipeg Free Press* is very critical of the Government in Ottawa. Not too often does that paper say very nice things about us. I do not know whether that is because it has some left-wing leanings or whether the paper is trying to bolster opposition Parties. Maybe it is just trying to be as polite to us as it can in a way that sometimes angers us. It is important to read what was written on the editorial page of the *Winnipeg Free Press* for February 20, 1987, a few days after the Budget was brought down by our Minister of Finance. Under the heading of "Opposition Nonsense" we read:

Opposition politicians have a problem when they are faced with a . . . Budget such as the one presented on Wednesday by Finance Minister Michael Wilson. They find themselves faced with television cameras and newspaper reporters all demanding comment. Custom and ritual demand that they say something damning. If they can find nothing sensible to say, they will feel compelled to say something silly. Thus, on Wednesday night, Canadians heard comments such as these.—

I want to remind my Liberal colleague just what is in this editorial:

Liberal Leader John Turner: "There is not one new single job contemplated in this Budget."

That is the first thing he said.

Mrs. Pépin: It is true.

Mr. Holtmann: It continues:

Wrong. There are tens of thousands of jobs contemplated.

"Our rate of job creation this year is expected once again to exceed that of any other major industrial country", Mr. Wilson said in his Budget speech. "Strong employment growth will be accompanied by large numbers of new entrants to the labour force." Even with those new entrants, the Finance Minister predicted the unemployment rate would drop from 9.4 per cent to 9 per cent.

Mrs. Pépin: I want the facts.