

The Budget

tion. One could only hope that the minimum wage and poverty line would be so flexible for Canadians.

The deficit that the Conservative party has suddenly found to be the major problem in the country popped up in December, 1988. In November, 1988, it was no problem at all. We went through a whole campaign and there was not a mention of it. "It is in our financial commitments and we are fiscally responsible". Two months later, all of a sudden, we broke all those promises and now the deficit is a major problem.

As far as the budget process is concerned, the Prime Minister in his now famous book that you can buy for 99 cents at any Coles bookstore across this country, said consultation is very important. The budget process must be a consultative one. It cannot be dropped out of nowhere one night. That is exactly what happened this time. The Minister of Finance was too busy to meet with anybody prior to this budget, breaking a long traditional process. Instead he sent out 50 letters. I think he read three of them. He read the ones from his friends and said this is what we have to do.

I am sure that the vision of the country that the government has is very different from our vision and this member's. He is a very caring politician. What is his vision of the country and how does he think the New Democratic Party would move toward that vision of our country?

Mr. Axworthy (Saskatoon—Clark's Crossing): Madam Speaker, I thank the member for his question. One thing about us as New Democrats is that, before anybody else and anything else, in terms of our approach to dealing with the deficit, which we recognize is a serious problem and the other problems of the country, we put people first.

• (1640)

There was an old slogan, of course, of the CCF: "People before profits." What that reflected was a desire to give people a helping hand, rather than a kick in the teeth, which is what the government specializes in.

So, we should put people first. We should look for policies which help people, care about people, enable people to live happy and healthy lives, enable people to be educated even though they may be poor, enable people to have health care even though they may be poor, and encourage them to work and have jobs, rather

than discourage them. We would help the regions, not hurt them. We would look for the resources to do that from people other than those whom the government looks to for those resources.

The government looks to the poor and the least able to provide the resources to deal with the country's problems and concerns. It leaves those who are most well off, the wealthy, the corporations with tax loopholes for the rich, and so on. That is where we would look for those ways in which we could provide the resources to solve the problems for the country.

Clearly, we would also attack interest rates in a meaningful way, which is simply not what this government is doing. In fact, interest rates are getting very close to the level at which the Liberals had them in their heyday. There is now a gap of almost 9 per cent between inflation and interest rates. At the height of the Liberal hypocrisy dealing with interest rates, the gap was about 11 per cent. We are not very far off from a very similar situation which hurts ordinary Canadians the most.

We would look for places where people are able to provide resources, not attack the least well off in our society.

Mr. Howard Crosby (Parliamentary Secretary to President of the Treasury Board): Mr. Speaker, let me continue this debate on the budget of 1990 by quoting some of the principles introduced by a Minister of Finance in the House of Commons. These are financial principles adopted by the Minister of Finance.

First, we must continue to practice fiscal responsibility. We must persist in restraining government spending. We must strive to contain the rise of the deficit—we must rigorously review our priorities to ensure that existing programs continue to serve valid objectives—we must continue to rely primarily on the dynamism and creativity of the private sector as the engine of growth in Canada.

I am sure members of Parliament recognize that as consistent with the thoughts expressed by the Minister of Finance in his budget. But they are, in fact, remarks made by the Hon. Marc Lalonde, when he introduced his budget in October, 1982.

Now the difference is that the Hon. Marc Lalonde as Minister of Finance under a Liberal government did not abide by those principles. He enunciated them in the House of Commons, but he did not follow them in his subsequent financial plans. As a result, we are left with