

Oral Questions

Mrs. Francine Lalonde (Mercier, BQ): Mr. Speaker, if we compare December with December, the figures are accurate, but the Minister of Finance is supposed to know that the figures we are referring to represent the annual average, which is 261,000 jobs, including 70,000 in Quebec.

Does the Minister of Finance not realize that such actions on his part would be totally irresponsible since he would be reducing transfer payments for education, health and social assistance, leaving the provinces with the extra burden while imposing national standards that are more and more restrictive under the circumstances? Is this what you call flexible federalism?

[English]

Hon. Paul Martin (Minister of Finance and Minister responsible for the Federal Office of Regional Development—Quebec, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is quite interesting that the member opposite and I are engaged in a debate as to whether the job creation record of the government in its first year of operation is the best record in five years or the best record in 10 years. But it is the best record we have seen in one heck of a long time.

The Minister of Human Resources Development made it very clear when he embarked on the program of social security reform that we intended to bring it into the nineties, that we intended to make social security reform a very important part of the job creation capacity of the country and a very important part of the overall program of the government.

I support what the minister has done. He has had the courage to deal with fundamental and far reaching changes. I find it very difficult that a party opposite is so rooted in the status quo, in the 1940s, that it fails to understand what the Canada of the future means.

Mr. Speaker: At the beginning of the period I said welcome to 1985 because in 1985 they had very long questions and very long answers. But in 1995 I am sure we are going to shorten both. The hon. member for Beaver River.

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THE ECONOMY

Miss Deborah Grey (Beaver River, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, we are glad to be here in the first period.

Canadians are among the highest taxed people in the world. Over 50 per cent of our pay cheques go to the tax man in one form or another. That is more than food, shelter and clothing combined. That would be more than enough but evidently it is not enough for this finance minister. He seems ready to add to our crippling tax load in this month's budget.

Canadians are not going to take it any more. Their message is no tax increases, period. Will the Prime Minister listen to Canadians and immediately rule out any tax increase in this month's budget?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, members of the Reform Party are very desperate. They set the target there to be in the news because they cannot really attack the government.

The hon. member should be patient—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Chrétien (Saint-Maurice): No, they cannot. Now they say that we will increase the taxes. Even I do not know. The budget will be later in the month. I will discuss that with the Minister of Finance.

• (1430)

Again the Reform Party will have to recognize that the Minister of Finance last year predicted that growth would be 3 per cent. It turned out to be 4.2 per cent. Inflation has been zero. Unemployment went down from a prediction of 11.1 per cent to 9.6 per cent.

We have a big problem, the debt. In the previous nine years before we arrived the previous government accumulated \$300 billion of its own debt. We have a problem with that. We all recognize it. We will do what we said we would do in the red book. We will meet our target of 3 per cent of GDP next year.

Miss Deborah Grey (Beaver River, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, aiming at a target of going \$25 billion per year in the hole is hardly considered noble.

The Prime Minister says to wait until the budget. That is of little comfort to Canadians. Why should home buyers who have seen their monthly mortgage rates go up over \$200 wait until the budget? Canadians want this government to act now. They have wanted it to act for over a year.

The finance minister is not dealing with abstract numbers. He is dealing with the lives of real people, not just balance sheets.

Will the Prime Minister send a clear signal to Canadians and tell them that their tax burden will not be increased by his government in its upcoming budget?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, nobody can say what will be in the budget until it is tabled in the House of Commons. It will be before the end of the month. It is going to be another good budget through which this government will meet its targets.

Miss Deborah Grey (Beaver River, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, when it comes to putting our national house in order, leadership should come from the top. We have seen precious little leadership from this government.