

Government Orders

should we not eliminate unfair tax irritants? I know that there is not enough money to be saved there to solve the problem of public finance, but the issue of family trusts is a bad symbol for taxpayers. Tax shelters which continue to benefit rich Canadians do not represent an astronomical amount of money, but they are important symbols in terms of tax fairness, at a time when the government is asking all taxpayers to tighten their belt. Yet, the minister did not see anything wrong there either.

Instead, the minister sees the culprits to be those who will be targeted by his measures, namely the unemployed and the poorest, who are already the most affected by the current crisis. This, in my opinion, is the most unacceptable side of the philosophy underlying the minister's approach.

• (1135)

The other attitude which I find just as despicable is this belief that the unemployed are unemployed by choice. The government seems to think that Quebecers and Canadians who are currently unemployed, who suffer from anxiety because they are without work, who feel they are losing their dignity as citizens, fathers and mothers, and who are losing hope about their future, live this situation by choice. The government seems to think that what these people need is a good scare to force them to find work. This is what is so unpleasant in the minister's attitude. Why is that? It is because no jobs are being created.

There is nothing in this agenda to make us think that the government will implement job creation measures. There is no employment policy. Yet, that word is everywhere in the document. But it is a euphemism used to conceal the reality and the reality is that there are no incentives to promote job creation.

This government has no creative spirit; it has not made any effort and it has not allocated any money to generate some enthusiasm in Canada and in Quebec to put people to work and to create jobs. No. It seems that those without jobs are in that situation by choice, because they are lazy.

The minister thinks that by making their plight even worse and by making these people even more distressed, he will force them to find jobs. But those jobs simply do not exist and that is the fundamental flaw in the minister's reform and philosophy.

On the subject of philosophy, let me quote an unbelievable principle stated on page 26 of the discussion paper. It says: "A social security system that is financially unsustainable is a dead end. Therefore, social security reform must in part entail making difficult choices about the best use of available funds". With that statement, the government is introducing a new concept for social programs designed to help people with special

needs: cost effectiveness. From now on, social programs will have to be cost effective.

This is what the discussion paper is all about. The minister is trying to ensure cost effectiveness, not as regards government programs, operating expenditures, taxation or inefficiencies resulting from overlapping, but in social programs. Government management is not cost effective, but the unemployed will have to be, even though they have no jobs.

There is another aspect of this document, and its spirit, which is truly unacceptable. It is the fact that this whole exercise is a sham. The government is not being honest. Let me give you two obvious examples. First, the minister, who was supposed to prepare an action plan, decided, even if it will take longer, perhaps a year, to hold consultations. Consequently, he drafts a so-called discussion paper, which he is careful not to label a policy statement, so as to always be able to argue that nothing has been decided and that this is still the consultation stage.

It contains some unacceptable things that will make people jump. So when questioned in the House or by journalists or in consultation sessions where people get excited and upset and concerned, he is prepared to say, "Do not worry. These are not decisions; this is only a consultation. I will listen to what you have to say and take it into consideration; then a decision will be made." That is how the discussion paper is presented.

In fact, thanks to a leak published in the *Toronto Star* yesterday, we now know that this minister and his colleague in Finance have already decided, regardless of the outcome of the "consultation", that a further \$7.5 billion will be cut from social programs within five years.

That is particularly odious for the people, the members of Parliament, the media and everyone who will be involved in this vast phony consultation. Yes, members of Parliament can go for five weeks throughout Canada to hear people's grievances, suggestions and reactions to this document, this "discussion paper"; members of Parliament can go around, political commentators can comment, the poor can always hope, MPs can always talk, but the decision has been made.

• (1140)

Whatever happens, whatever people say about these consultations, a further \$7.5 billion will be cut and no one on the government side has denied it. It took a fortunate leak, I would say, from the *Toronto Star* for us to learn that this cut has been decided. Furthermore, it was also decided to keep it secret. The leaked Cabinet document shows that the two ministers got together secretly, shut the door and swore that this decision would remain secret and that they would hide it, letting people naively believe that this document is only a discussion paper.