

*The Address—Mr. Assad*

When we consider these obstacles, we have to ask the question, where is the opportunity? What opportunity is there for four and a half million people who live below the poverty line, when you consider that in the 1.2 million jobs created in the last four years, nearly half are slightly above the minimum wage?

[Translation]

Need I also tell you that studies, masses of statistics, show that women on the labour market do not earn as much as men? Is this also a lack of opportunity for women to advance in the working world? I claim that a Speech from the Throne should touch on opportunity, democracy and the freedom to pursue one's own interests; basically, we want every citizen in our country to be treated fairly. And as I said in English, the taxation system is an extremely important factor in our democracy and it must at all times be fair for all our citizens.

[English]

Opportunity is the driving force of a prosperous and contented people. But I feel it is narrowing visibly, and the results are affecting the social fabric of our society. We must remember that when we have growing poverty, and especially growing inequality in our tax system, we are going to have growing unrest. The growing unrest that we knew in the 1960s will seem quite insignificant when we consider that people will rise from all parts of this country and point the finger that they have been treated in a fashion that is inequitable, that the tax system has been geared to the advantage of the financial elite.

I am sure that is not the first time it has been said here in the House, but the fact remains that this margin is growing, and we must address the problem as soon as possible.

[Translation]

Mr. Speaker, we heard in this House a number of speeches stressing the fact that we have a tax system that is unfair, especially to the middle income group. As we know, people in the middle-income group are quite busy earning their daily living. Unlike large corporations, they have no lawyers or other professionals to look after their interests on a daily basis and can make representations to government decision-makers in order to ensure that

their interests are always protected or to find loopholes in our tax system. We should not expect that the people who are faced with higher taxes will always remain silent because they are the so-called "silent majority". Sooner or later, those people will rise up, and at that point there will be something akin to a revolution of the middle-class, who will demand explanations from the Government.

Looking at the deficit that is increasing yearly, what leeway will the Central Government have to impose new ones, and especially to tell middle income people: we are going to alleviate your tax burden. We will not be able to do so, and therein lies the danger.

To conclude, Mr. Speaker, there are three essential items in our society: opportunity, democracy, which means the freedom to further one's interest, and of course fairness. Those three items should never be lost sight of.

There is another very important item that was not mentioned in the Throne Speech—it is the whole issue of education, the gaps in our education system, the need for reforms and for perhaps more investment into education.

Doubtless an efficient and forward looking education system opens up new opportunities. I remember that a few weeks after the French President Mr. Mitterand was re-elected, the following question was asked of him: In your second seven-year term, what is in your view, the most important item for France? And his answer was that during his second term his only goal, the only thing he would like to achieve was an efficient reform of the education system that would bring France back, well prepared, into the 20th century, and were that goal to be reached, France would be at the top of the industrialized nations.

Of course, I was struck by that comment, and the more I think of it, indeed the best tool we can give our people is to see to it that we have the resources needed to make education in Canada accessible to all, as this is the best way to achieve a fair society and at the same time open up new opportunities for our fellow Canadians, something that will cause the people to be satisfied not only with their Government but its achievements concerning both the nation and the individuals.