

This government could have brought about the oil agreement two years ago and given back some much needed strength to our economy and bolstered the Canadian dollar on world markets. This government preferred playing petty politics, through the minister concerned, the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources (Mr. Lalonde), and confronting a government which could also justify its position. We must now pay very dearly for all this. This government scrapped the private sector policy that we, on this side of the House, had developed for Canadian businessmen. This government refused to support an interest rate policy that would have stimulated the construction industry which is the mainspring of our economy. And now, these people who defeated us because our proposal for home owners did not directly affect the tenants—

An hon. Member: Ignorant!

Mr. La Salle: Ignorant? Which side was the most ignorant, when we knew quite well that a policy favouring home owners would help to maintain normal rental costs? Because the government refused to grant a preferential interest rate to such an essential sector of our economy as the construction industry, we now have major problems and thousands of unemployed people in Canada. And these people say that we are playing petty politics when thousands of Canadians urge us to fight against this government. This is what Canadians are asking us to do today, Mr. Speaker.

● (2050)

The Minister of Finance says that he is flexible because he has been forced to back up on 18 points. This is gross incompetence, Mr. Speaker! I was on an open line program this morning with a Liberal Member of Parliament. I shall not give his name yet. I bet that you also know who he is, but you will not mention his name either. He admitted that the Liberal members had not been informed of the projections made by the Minister of Finance. They knew nothing about what the budget would contain. Is it possible that these government members were not at least aware of the main thrust of this budget? He confessed to it on an open line program on CKVL, Mr. Speaker, if this can help you identify this hon. member. This is impossible. These same people are now saying that they have succeeded in convincing the Minister of Finance to reverse his decisions. Mr. Speaker, this so-called flexibility is simply unacceptable incompetence which reflects on the whole Liberal Party. In the last two days I have noticed that the Prime Minister seems a bit out of sorts. He is not happy with his Minister of Finance. In view of the opposition that is felt everywhere, of the pressures which are exerted and of the comments which are heard from all sectors, I wonder how the government members can still honestly support, endorse and encourage this Minister of Finance. Only 20 of them were here to listen to his speech this afternoon. That is very few! Only 20! I understand that the great majority preferred to remain in

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their offices and I wonder if these same people will not remain in their offices when we vote this evening, and I believe that it would be the best thing they could do for Canada.

An hon. Member: Do not count on it!

Mr. La Salle: I believe that it is the hon. member for Saint-Jacques (Mr. Guilbault) who said that I should not count on it.

I know them, Mr. Speaker. Even if it hurts them, even if this is against the interests of their constituents, as they have been doing for the past 15 years, they will behave like sheep and blindly support the Minister of Finance whom they are not particularly fond of, something I can quite easily understand. But the example is a good demonstration of this and could not lie, in my opinion. This afternoon I merely asked the Minister of State responsible for finance, who was bragging about the fact that his government had taken steps to streamline the footwear industry—basically, that is a good thing, and we were quite happy about that. The Minister of State responsible for finance did not allow me to finish—

An hon. Member: Are you not pleased now?

Mr. La Salle: Of course we are pleased to see Canada promote the Canadian footwear industry. I simply and honestly asked the minister to tell us why—instead of calling us ignorant—I repeat that I have never been guilty of such hypocrisy—why it had suddenly decided to revive this industry, after waiting so long that jobs were lost by the thousands in Quebec. But the Minister of State would not answer. I was not asking anything else, Mr. Speaker. And the Minister of State is perfectly aware that we have indeed lost jobs by the thousands not only in Quebec, but in other parts of Canada as well, in the footwear industry. Jobs by the thousands! Because the government has procrastinated. It has waited so long that it will cost more jobs, especially in the province of Quebec. I remember that the hon. member for Drummond (Mr. Pinard) had given the Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce a tongue lashing in public and, in my opinion, with good reason. And there is another member, I believe it is the hon. member for Shefford (Mr. Lapierre), although I am not sure—I believe he too is concerned with the problems of the footwear industry. We certainly are also affected by those problems in my riding.

The lack of action on the part of the government is costing us a pretty penny in that sector, and there are also others that are suffering. The Minister of State for Finance gave us a course in economics today. I had a feeling I was hearing again the speech the former minister of finance and present Minister of Justice made seven or eight years ago. He told us then about the same things. Still, the present minister did a better job of it because when the former minister of finance, now Minister of Justice, gave us that speech, I had a feeling he understood absolutely nothing about what he was reading. Today, the Minister of State for Finance gave me the impression he understood what he was reading. He tried to show us that two