

*Government Orders*

children, as someone mentioned earlier. The same would apply to all other sectors of what we call the social economy, an economy which is essential if a society is to function adequately.

We realize that an economy based solely on profit creates two categories of people in our society: those that perform well under the system, and those that have a hard time following and that we try to help survive with what I would call financial valium, compensation funds. Clearly, some people need social assistance in order to continue living, eating, and so on. However, I believe that we should aim higher than that, we should use the human potential of everybody and institute yearly evaluations of the government, or evaluations at the end of the mandate, based not only on financial performance, on the amount of money saved, but also on the way it has managed to use the potential of its citizens.

• (1925)

It would be a different societal choice. However, we would need to have the guts to put such an objective on the table. The role of government is to initiate this kind of debate. I would suggest something like a national forum. It would generate a very interesting discussion.

We clearly agreed on another matter, which is the need to cut spending. Everywhere in Canada, we share the view that the country has been living beyond its means for quite some time. The problem is to cut in the right place. There is a very traditional war of influence going on, whereby the best organized people manage to avoid having their services cut, while the less organized see them reduced year after year.

We saw that in the tabling of the unemployment insurance reform. Clearly, the government is attacking seasonal workers, when it says that a seasonal worker, after three years, after having used more than 100 weeks of UI, will see his benefits reduced by 5 per cent. It is clear in my mind that it is attacking people who are not as well organized in society, while there are very powerful lobbies that manage to pull through much more easily.

I believe that a government has the responsibility to ensure that these things do not happen and we have the responsibility, as parliamentarians, to look at budgetary issues from that perspective.

The Bloc Québécois has brought forward some aspects that it would be interesting to submit, especially in this prebudget period. One of these is to review all tax conventions that were signed with countries considered as tax havens. There are known examples, such as several hundreds of millions of dollars that escape Canadian tax authorities because of these conventions. This is the time, while we are preparing for the budget, to examine these things.

Another aspect would be to proceed with a comprehensive review of taxation in order to streamline the system and re-establish equity, through eliminating tax inequities that may benefit large businesses and high income taxpayers. We find everywhere, at all the doors we are knocking on in our ridings, the need for people to see that there is equity. For example, there are some 77,000 profitable businesses that did not pay one cent of tax in a given year of the tax cycle. This number must disappear so that a business that makes profits pays taxes.

Prebudget consultations have also brought to light the fact that all taxpayers are not on the same footing, as far as interpreting the Income Tax Act is concerned. Not everybody can afford an accountant or a tax lawyer, but big corporations can, and they find each and every loophole in the legislation. Maybe it is time for a major clean-up in our tax system to prevent such things. I think Quebecers and Canadians are ready for a major overhaul of the tax system.

We should never forget that all of this is meant to give more fairness in our society, more opportunities for all to make use of their skills, experience happiness, earn a decent living for their family, and contribute to society.

If we kept that goal in mind and if we systematically and relentlessly tailored government policies to that goal, we would bring about significant changes. Attitudes would change, and we no longer consider economic viability and social issues as some of our major problems.

• (1930)

I think any society should have criteria by which it can assess both its economic performance and its treatment of people. Mr. Lévesque used to say that a society should be judged by the way it treats its most disadvantaged members. This is a rule we should always keep in mind to be able to know whether we deliver and whether people are proud of what we do as parliamentarians.

Today, they are not. Clearly, there is a cleavage. Our constituency offices receive letters saying: "What are you waiting for? Why do you not do something to make people with a big income and who avoid taxes pay their fair share?"

To conclude, I think it is important to keep this in mind in the choices that have to be made. We should ensure that, with the next set of budget cuts, everybody feels that equity has prevailed and that all taxpayers are doing their share and contributing, so that in the end, nobody will get the impression that some abuse the system while others are shortchanged.

That way, consultations from year to year will be profitable if suggestions are taken into consideration and influence budgetary choices and if, after a few years, all taxpayers are on a more equal footing.