

The Budget

This morning, opposition party members were giving us perhaps 1 or 2 out of 5. I am surprised that they did not find anything good about the budget. It is beyond me. I know that some people would like to find us to identify issues close to their hearts and would like to make recommendations to improve the situation with regard to those issues. I understand that and I respect that. That is the role of the opposition. However, I do not understand why they cannot find anything positive in the whole budget. It is beyond me.

One thing that also surprises me about the Bloc is that they think that there is a federalist hiding behind each reduction and each operation. They say that it must be a prerferendum strategy, that, yes, there is something there, that there has to be something there. They think that even if there seems to be nothing, there is surely something. They imagine that there is a federalist lurking behind each comma, each period, each word, each sentence.

The budget is reasonable, fair and tough and it is also sensitive to regions. When you take the position of the far right—

[English]

That is the Reform Party. I talk about the extreme right, the Reform Party. The Reform Party came forward with "a budget". Of course I did not see one positive comment from any responsible journalist across the country on it. The fact that it is going to sit here and criticize this budget perhaps lacks some substance in credibility.

Again I would invite its members if I am wrong to correct me. I would invite them as well to suggest how this document can be improved. That is the challenge I offer my colleagues from both opposition parties, the official opposition as well as the third party.

Do not just stand there and shoot at this budget. Stand up and make sound recommendations so that it can be improved for the benefit of this nation and for the benefit of all Canadians. That is the challenge.

I spent some time in opposition. I rather enjoyed it I must confess because one has a responsibility obviously to critique that which comes forward. That is fair. Surely the responsibility goes beyond simply taking particular issues where one feels that the government might be vulnerable or where one feels one might have a political advantage. I accept that. However, it goes beyond that and one has a responsibility to make concrete suggestions.

● (1315)

[Translation]

To my friends from both parties on the other side of this House, I would like to offer this challenge. We have a number of days to debate this budget and make progress. Criticize all you want in a constructive manner but please, make suggestions that will improve what has been proposed. Make suggestions which will meet the needs of Canadians everywhere and allow us to be much more sensitive than we might have been if we had not had

a chance to share your ideas and your political wisdom had you chosen to use those qualities for something else than attacking this budget. I underline that it has been well accepted up until now throughout the country, but even more important, on international markets.

Mr. Michel Bellehumeur (Berthier—Montcalm, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to say to the hon. member for Saint-Boniface that if we were smiling on this side, it is simply because we are always astonished to see how a government member can turn a deaf ear to politics with a small "p", as the Leader of the Opposition said earlier.

When the hon. member says that we have found no positive elements in the budget, it is not true. I wish he had understood or listened completely to the speech that the leader of the Official Opposition gave earlier. My friend would have seen that the hon. member for Lac-Saint-Jean referred to some positive things. However, this budget does not go far enough. It contains inequities, and I will mention only three to the hon. member for Saint-Boniface because my time is limited.

The member for St. Boniface says he saw nothing unequitable or unfair in this budget. First, does he think it is fair to cut \$32 million from subsidies paid to Quebec farmers and dairy farmers and to give western farmers \$2.9 billion to compensate them for cuts that are, relatively speaking, identical? Does he think such a cut is fair? He also mentioned family trusts. Is it fair to wait until 1999 to take action in this area?

By 1999, there will be no more money in family trusts. Those persons will have found other tax shelters to protect themselves. The budget should have addressed this issue immediately.

Finally, does the member think it is normal that banks, among others, be taxed a mere hundred million dollars when a single bank, the Royal Bank, made more than \$1.2 billion in profits last year? Is it normal? Is it fair? I would like to hear what the member for St. Boniface has to say on those issues.

By the way, the member for St. Boniface quoted headlines from some newspapers in his riding. I suppose he should have, as a French speaking member, chosen at least a few headlines from French newspapers in his riding. I do not know. Maybe francophones are less well served in his province than in Quebec.

Mr. Duhamel: Mr. Speaker, I will start with the last comment. No French papers were published last night or this morning. That is why I did not quote any.

As for French speaking citizens of my province, yes, indeed there have been very positive improvements. I do believe that the constituents in my riding are well served by their federal member and their provincial member, as well as their municipal councillor, since we are all French speaking. We will see. Eventually we will have to go back before the electorate. I was elected in 1988, and again in 1993, and I might get elected again in 1997 or 1998. We shall see. I will let my constituents pass judgment, rather than my friend from the Bloc Quebecois.