

Supply

Mr. Blackburn (Brant): You are on the road to Damascus.

Mr. Broadbent: Mr. Speaker, it has been very rare since I have heard such an intelligent, imaginative and thoughtful question.

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Broadbent: I would simply say that I accept the implicit conclusions from the questions, as the Member did, I think, listening to my speech, and express my hope that at two o'clock when Question Period begins in the House he will raise those questions for the Minister of Finance.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

[*Translation*]

Hon. Lucien Bouchard (Minister of the Environment): Mr. Speaker, I would like to start by thanking the Hon. Member for Hamilton East (Ms. Copps) for her courtesy in making it possible for me to rise in the House at this time, especially since this will give me a chance to leave on departmental business right away.

I will not be as complimentary about the substance of the speech by the Leader of the New Democratic Party, the Hon. Member for Oshawa (Mr. Broadbent). I must say I am astonished by both aspects of the motion before the House today, a motion that complains about a lack of fairness in the Budget and, secondly, condemns the Government's commitment to the environment.

I would like to comment very briefly on the first aspect, which will be dealt with at length by my fellow Members. I was very surprised, when listening to his criticism of the Budget, that the Hon. Member for Oshawa failed to consider the fundamental issue of governmental responsibility for taxation and for sound government finance.

We are all sympathetic, and we all agree, that a government's first commitment must be to the social aspects of its mandate and that the social programs of a country like Canada form the basis of our Government's mandate.

That being said, the best way to guarantee that social programs will be preserved is to maintain a strong government that is able to intervene and to stand by its commitments to our neediest fellow Canadians.

However, there is no indication in the comments and criticisms of the Opposition—an Opposition that criticizes because that is its duty, its role, and that is perfectly legitimate—we never see any recognition of the fact that we have, throughout the country, a responsibility for public finances, and that those finances must absolutely be sound if we are to maintain social programs. In other words, our responsibility is not just to Canadians living today who are having trouble surviving, we also have a responsibility to future generations. We all inherited a country led by a government that had no debts. When we were born, when we started to work, when we got our first jobs, we were living in a country that was built on a very sound financial foundation.

Mr. Speaker, I hope, we hope, and I am sure the Opposition Parties do as well, for reasons that are laid down in their respective programs, to be able to leave our children the same country we inherited.

As far as the environment is concerned, and that is the question that interests me more directly, I am truly astonished. First of all, I deplore the psychological inability of Opposition Members to show any recognition for what the Government has accomplished in this field.

• (1200)

I will not dwell upon the issue because we have already done so. Still it might be appropriate to recall that ours is the first Government which passed comprehensive legislation touching on all environmental aspects and establishing the framework and course of an environment program for all future administrations in Canada—including provincial governments.

This legislation defines corporate and individual responsibilities, giving the Government additional and extremely extensive authority to protect the environment. And, of course, it was our Government which was the driving force behind the signatories to the 1987 Montreal agreement, the first major such international achievement with respect to atmosphere and ozone protection. Thanks to the effort of this Government, Canada now stands among leaders in the fight to protect the environment.

However I can see that Canada's outstanding reputation abroad has never been something that would make Hon. Members opposite stand proud. Yet it seems to me there are times when all Canadians ought to rejoice over the fact that this country is known the world over for spearheading the advance in environmental matters.