

Government Orders

The choice of the members opposite is clear in this budget. Their preference for the rich is obvious. The federal government is the protector of the well-to-do and the financial community.

In the end, it is the lower and medium income taxpayers, always the same, who are affected. The unemployed, the disadvantaged, the sick and the homeless are paying for this budget, in which the government lacks the courage to reach into the impenetrable pockets of the more well off. This budget will mean real hardship: lower UI benefits, fewer assistance programs and shrinking health insurance.

Seniors are given a break, this year. However, it is not hard to guess the intentions of the Minister of Finance.

● (1720)

Following the referendum, he will once again go after old age pensions and cut seniors' income, which in many instances, is the bare minimum. Our seniors are entitled to reasonable living conditions. They are also entitled to certain small pleasures.

When the minister's axe falls next year, I fear these small pleasures will disappear, and their quality of life will decline. Women will be hit even harder by the federal government's choices. The concept of family income to be included in various programs affects them directly, because they are the least well off and the most dependent on their partners. By a single stroke, program universality will end for many women, who will thus be condemned to continued economic dependence and poverty. It is a real scandal.

The fact is that the disadvantaged and the middle class are getting poorer. The other fact is that the rich are getting richer. And the government is biting into these facts with gusto—it is broadening the gap between the poor and the rich with its budget and tax choices. What shameful choices.

The budget of the millionaire of finance is just for show. A series of cuts here and there, cuts without vision. And the members opposite are all pleased and smug about this ineffective budget, designed solely to provide a short term response to financial markets. For over 17 months now, the Bloc Québécois has been asking the government to do its work seriously. The Bloc demands that the government get to the real root of the problem: duplication and deep, structural unemployment.

The Finance millionaire ignores these two issues. But, remember the credo of the red book, the bible that was shelved immediately following the election: jobs, jobs, jobs. Where are all of the jobs so promised, which were supposed to kick-start economic recovery? Obviously, the opposite has happened. Economic recovery is creating jobs, jobs, jobs, not government action. Inaction is more like it.

Nice election promises will not fight poverty. One of the best ways of doing it is to give people the opportunity to acquire a

certain wealth through employment. That is a solution seriously worth considering.

Work, employment combat poverty. Where are those major and effective job-creating measures? Nowhere to be seen. The federal government's infrastructure program distributed mere crumbs, and, now, the government is idling. The people opposite are bragging about jobs that were not created by them, but by the economic recovery which, for the most part, was powered by our neighbours to the south.

The federal government does not want to recant. The system is made that way and the faith that the people opposite have in their system is as tough as nails. The decentralization that they say they are going to implement in the budget is an empty shell, a cover for a vast offloading operation onto the provinces. In fact, it is the deficit that is being decentralized, not powers.

Still, before the budget, the carrot they dangled was the possibility of the federal government withdrawing from provincial areas of jurisdiction and transferring to the provinces the corresponding financial resources. Nothing but smoke and mirrors. The budget does the opposite: it perpetuates a domineering central government and ten subservient provinces.

Quebecers will soon make a decision on their future. I am convinced that they will reject this domineering federalism and this government which is eating away at the social fabric to please financiers.

Quebec needs all of the tools available if it wants to build a fairer society based on something other than purely pecuniary values. Globalization of markets, international competition, profits, economic development at any price are all well and good. But, what use are they if the population is abused and neglected? Quebecers will make their own choices.

[English]

Mr. Myron Thompson (Wild Rose, Ref.): Madam Speaker, it gives me pleasure to speak on this bill.

During the last couple of months since the bringing down of the budget, I have been a little disappointed at many of the things I have heard. Members on the government side have talked about the number of occasions they have gone into the communities and towns throughout Canada and have talked to people at various gatherings and now government has a clear understanding of what Canadians want. Government then comes down with what it did and the rhetoric begins.

● (1725)

I find it strange because I too have been out to various areas, not just in my own riding but throughout the country. Maybe I operate a little differently than government members do but my conversations are with farmers while sitting on the tailgate of a pick-up truck or with a policeman while riding around in his cruiser. I do that rather than sitting with top bureaucrats or other elites.