

The Budget

• (1710)

I see the hon. member for Laval. When he was mayor, he always refused to allow co-operative housing. No wonder!

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): The period for questions and comments has now expired.

[*English*]

Mr. Les Benjamin (Regina—Lumsden): Mr. Speaker, I want to direct some remarks not only to the government and the Official Opposition but to my own party as well.

I first want to get rid of this mythology that the NDP and the CCF before they were the big spenders. Mr. Speaker, name me a provincial, municipal or federal government where the NDP got us into this kind of mess.

An hon. member: Ontario.

Mr. Benjamin: The Ontario deficit was in excess of \$8 billion when the NDP took power. It was increased by \$1 billion putting people to work.

An hon. member: Now it is \$14 billion.

Mr. Benjamin: In my own province we are not the big spenders. Tory and Liberal governments all across this country were the big spenders and they spent it on the wrong things. Let me tell the House why.

We have to rebuild our nation. If we want people in all parts of our country to have confidence in this country, we need policies of full employment. We did it before and we can do it again.

I am amused by the colleague who just spoke about the private sector, small, middle and big businesses. I find it strange, in nearly 24 years of being here, that whenever they are in trouble they are the first ones to come to Ottawa with their hands out—and I have been in dozens of committee meetings—asking for something from the government. At the same time the Chamber of Commerce and the Canadian Manufacturers' Association tells us: "Leave us alone, don't interfere".

I want to illustrate what we did before and what we can do again. I will start with my own province. It was totally bankrupt in 1944. We could not give Saskatchewan government bonds away. Our total highway system was run into the ground. Our farmers and our municipalities were faced with seed grain and relief debts. If those debts were translated into 1991 dollars, it would put the

provincial deficit five times higher than it is now and, thanks to eight years of Tories, we have a \$7.5 billion deficit in our province for one million people.

The experts, the economists, the press and even Liberals and Tories said what we did could not be done. We did not know any better; we just went and did it anyway. From 1944 to 1956 we rebuilt every mile of highway in that province, the largest number of miles per person of any province in the country because it is all flat and far.

We tripled our power generation capacity and in those 12 years took electricity to 40,000 farms. We were bankrupt and we borrowed money. In the short term we increased our deficit but we had full employment. We took sewer and water to hundreds of communities, towns and villages in our province. We still have too damn many communities in the country now that do not have that, especially in the north. We have no excuse. We did it before with policies of full employment.

The Liberal government of the late forties and early fifties, we scared the hell out of it as a result of the 1945 federal election. It did some marvellous things in those years. I want to remind my colleagues that we financed the entire Second World War without a nickel of foreign investment. This chronic appeal that we need to have foreign investment is baloney. We paid for all of that ourselves. Following the war we paid for what we had to do because the infrastructure of our economy and our nation was ground to a halt.

With 10 years of drought and depression and 6 years of war the whole place had to be rebuilt, and we did it. Even the business community was demanding that the government intervene, that the government provide incentive, motivation and challenge to the whole nation.

I wonder if the governments of this day—and I even worry about the NDP governments in B.C., Saskatchewan and Ontario—have the imagination and courage to do it. We are not in a recession. We have been and are now in a depression.

In relative terms, by comparison people are suffering today to the same degree or to a larger degree than they were in the dirty thirties. I say do not try to kid the troops about this being a recession that is going away. We have been trying to kid the people through this Parliament for the last two years that somehow or other the recession is