

The Budget—Mr. Ethier

who are being squeezed like lemons by the government. This must be the reward given by the Liberal party to the Canadian people to thank them for having supported it in the last election.

● (1440)

[English]

The last thing I want to say is that we are now getting into a funny world and the greater our natural resources become, the greater our poverty will become due to direct taxes on these resources.

Mr. Denis Ethier (Glengarry-Prescott-Russell): Mr. Speaker, I had not intended to participate in this debate as I thought I should give the time to more qualified members of the House to speak on this important subject, but after hearing the hon. member for York-Simcoe (Mr. Stevens) and the long monologue of the hon. member for Battle River (Mr. Malone), I thought my qualifications were not all that bad. So here I am, offering my two cents.

[Translation]

I am very pleased to take part in the budget debate and contrarily to what I heard from the opposition members I would like to congratulate the Minister of Finance (Mr. Turner) for bringing in his fifth budget. As he said at the outset and I quote:

This has been a tough budget to prepare.

And I entirely agree with him. He listed later on several reasons why it was difficult for him to prepare it, as there was need on the one hand to restrain inflation which is still threatening and on the other to make sure that every Canadian wishing to work has his place on the labour market. And to this, let us add a serious world problem, namely the rocketing prices of oil and even a possible scarcity of this precious product in many countries, including ours.

I am convinced, Mr. Speaker, that the minister's task was further complicated by the total lack of positive criticisms from the opposition because certainly the Canadian voters represented here by opposition members deserve the same treatment as those represented by government members when such a budget is prepared. But as a result of that total lack of constructive and positive criticism, the minister had to spend much more time consulting different social groups in order to steer a middle course and draft what I call a balanced budget; I hasten to explain that I do not mean a balanced budget in financial terms but rather in the sense that we attack inflation while maintaining our priorities of creating jobs for all Canadians willing to be members of that group of Canadians at work.

I perfectly agree with that part of the budget which suggests tightening up the terms of the Unemployment Insurance Act. It is suggested that the penalty be increased from three to six weeks for those who voluntarily leave their jobs; I would have suggested that we simply refuse to pay any benefit to those who quit their jobs, except when they do so for acceptable reasons.

In my opinion, Mr. Speaker, far too many Canadian workers see that legislation as holiday insurance and they do not realize that this could cost millions of dollars to good Canadians who keep their jobs.

[Mr. Beaudoin.]

Many Canadian workers will greatly appreciate another amendment to the Unemployment Insurance Act which provides for a 25-week sickness benefit period instead of 15 as is now the case. I would have preferred that benefits be paid for a period of up to 52 weeks to those that are ill, in the same way as to those who are looking for a job. I am also pleased to note that \$450 million are earmarked for creating jobs under various programs as vocational training, placement and mobility, summer jobs and activities for students and a new local initiatives program that will give priority to municipal projects.

Since 1971-72, more than \$550 million have gone to such programs, but provinces reserve the right to give those moneys to municipalities of their own choice. I noticed that the Toronto government did certainly not favour the eastern constituencies I am representing, because out of the \$126 million received by the province of Ontario, the provincial constituency of Prescott-Russell got a mere \$300,000 and that of Glengarry a mere \$350,000. But a Toronto suburban constituency got more than \$6 million. In order to correct such discrepancies, I would strongly urge that any new joint program should first be negotiated with an undertaking—I would even say with a commitment—from the Ontario government, that the eastern constituencies I am representing be recognized as part of that province, and that a fair share of the money go to Glengarry-Prescott-Russell, as compared to the Toronto area constituencies.

[English]

Much more could be said of all that is rosy in this budget, such as the increased funding for CMHC, increased tax credits, the increased rate of return on investment in Government of Canada annuities which are held by more than 200,000 Canadians, and removal of the 5 per cent sales tax on insulation materials. But as a responsible member of this government, I should like to discuss the less rosy measures in the budget, such as the special excise tax on gasoline which will cost ten cents a gallon more for personal travel.

Although this measure is criticized vigorously by the opposition and even by Bill Davis, the premier of this province, we must appreciate the fact that we still enjoy a much lower cost of gasoline than most countries in the industrialized world. The Premier of Ontario seems to forget that offshore oil, which supplies our eastern markets, costs some \$11 a barrel, but because of the quick and wise action of this federal government in imposing an export tax on oil exports to the United States we still enjoy \$8 a barrel oil, even with this latest \$1.50 per barrel increase.

● (1450)

I say the Premier of Ontario should also be reminded of the fact that in order to guarantee a supply to our Canadian market we had to reduce our exports from 1,200,000 barrels a day to some 450,000 to 500,000 barrels a day presently and gradually to reduce exports until such time as the Canadian market will consume all the Canadian production, leaving us no revenue from export sales to cushion or, in plain terms, to reduce the price for our offshore purchases.