

*The Budget*

this or that benefit because they had dependant children. So, when the minister introduces this notion of dependant children to justify bringing the UI benefit rate down from 57 to 55 per cent for all recipients, a rate which is getting close to the US rate by the way, when the minister uses that excuse to say: "How generous. We do have the well-being of the less fortunate at heart", he is actually taking us back to the dark old days when women had to prove they were worthy in their private lives of being recognized as independent, single mothers who needed adequate support.

• (1750)

That is why I want to denounce as a fraud a budget speech which is supposed to be liberal and progressive, but is in fact bringing us back to the days before the 1970s reform. This measure will open the door to all sorts of inquiries, nit-picking, whistle-blowing and create a system within a system, again, to save about \$10 a week.

Chances are that this measure will not cost much, considering how long it takes for a decision to be made and for the first UI cheque to be issued. It is not true that we are creating this wonderful world. On the other hand, we are setting ourselves a dangerous course with this widespread consultation on social programs. The government is leaning toward the concept of family income, a concept which, in so far as social assistance is concerned, plunged us into a kind of inquisition situation which I denounced earlier.

The axe will also fall on seasonal workers, on those who have trouble finding steady work either because they are young, lack basic experience or work in areas where despite their qualifications, they cannot find work. These are the people who benefit from the 10/42 or 10/39 system.

Instead of attacking the regions' structural problems, the government is shifting the burden of responsibility onto individuals and restricting their access to unemployment insurance and to the benefits to which they are entitled. What is the Minister of Finance doing to resolve the problems of those who are in need? Nothing. He has failed to propose any solutions. Worse still, he has scrapped several tax incentives and regional subsidies, leaving people in the regions without any hope at all.

The extent of the cuts to unemployment insurance and the introduction of the concept of family income prove to anyone who may have doubted it that with its attempt at the so-called modernization and restructuring of social security programs, the government is merely turning the clock back to the 1970s. At the same time, the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Human Resources Development are resurrecting the old ghosts of the 1970s. They are proposing to take a trip down memory lane and

to reinstate the outdated, archaic concept of basing benefit levels on family status.

The government is announcing a reduction of more than \$5.5 billion in the unemployment insurance budget over the next two years. And that is not all. That is only one aspect of the upcoming social program reform.

We cannot help but be concerned about another aspect, namely social assistance reform, and the more than likely decision on the part of the government not to renew the Canada Assistance Plan. It is indeed cause for concern because it is specific. As for total savings, the Minister of Finance says that the reform will have to result in savings of more than \$7.5 billion by the end of 1996-1997. That is his objective and the consultation currently being planned may in fact never take place.

Three clear, inescapable conclusions can be drawn from the budget figures. First, the only major cuts announced in this budget—and I am not saying that the cuts to the military are not major, but when compared to cuts to social spending, they are minor—for the next two years affect social programs, more specifically, the unemployed and those who are often the most vulnerable.

Second, the Minister of Human Resources Development cannot continue making fun of Quebecers and Canadians any longer by pretending to consult them about their priorities and concerns, since his own priorities and concerns, namely moving ahead with cuts, are reflected in the budget.

• (1755)

I urge him, Madam Speaker, to immediately table his reform project and to get rid of these experts at \$500 a day plus expenses.

Third, if the finance minister is able to assess so accurately the effects of reform, it must be because his government's project has been ready for a long time since it is that of the Conservatives.

We can understand by looking around us and guessing the rest why, early in the election campaign, Ms. Campbell shied away from the possible consequences of reform. She was not as cynical as this government, elected to create jobs, which is sticking to its predecessor's policy of cutbacks.

It must be said that, in their time, the Conservatives followed the Liberals' policy. They implemented all major recommendations of the Macdonald Commission created by former Prime Minister Trudeau, except for one, income security reform. That is where we are now. We are looking at the Macdonald Commission's plan, with variations we may admire, of course, but most of that plan is there, with details we can guess at.

Declarations by the minister followed on the heels of declarations by the deputy ministers. We must not forget that the deputy ministers who briefed the minister are the same ones who