

Letter

With solidarity, we can create the Quebec we want

You can agree or disagree with the public finance positions put forward by the CSN. Everyone's opinion is welcome. However, the debate about the kind of Quebec we want cannot be separated from the need for more progressive taxation; one does not go without the other.

CSN members want the same things the general population indicated it favours in many opinion surveys: they would rather preserve public services and programs than lower taxes. When you have a lower salary, you are more aware of the importance of public services to help make ends meet. Each year, 113,449 people receive parental benefits, 535,000 households receive the work premium (refundable tax credit) for low income earners, \$1.8 million is spent on subsidized child care, 139,000 students in higher education receive government aid, more than 5 million hospital days are free, 1,550,000 people receive a cheque from the Régie des rentes du Québec that often represents a large part of their retirement income, more than 287,000 people are enrolled in adult education classes, and \$2.7 billion is spent on professional training by Emploi Québec in order to preserve employability and jobs. Finally, more than 200 villages needed Quebec government help in the wake of a forestry industry crisis. These are but some examples of how the government needs to act to impact lives in an important way.

In announcing its plan to return to a balanced budget, Quebec signalled spending cuts totalling \$900 million a year for the next five years. Luc Godbout, accounting and fiscal sciences professor at the Université de Sherbrooke, explains that this would be like closing the following ministries: culture, sustainable development, economic development, families and the elderly, international relations, tourism, agriculture and labour!

Taxation is a strong lever that encourages solidarity, distributes wealth and creates equal opportunities. The measures that the CSN has proposed to avoid cuts include: deferring the deadline for a return to a balanced budget, fighting tax evasion, revising business taxes, regulating the financial economy, collecting mining royalties, and imposing luxury and environmental taxes, among others. And there is an idea on the list that calls for a more progressive taxation system by adding a fourth tax level for high income earners. At the federal level, even under a Harper government, a fourth taxation increment for those earning \$126,000 or more already exists.

No societal project can advance without accompanying taxation. This is something we can learn from Scandinavian countries that have higher rates of taxation and which are, at the same time, champions in the fight against inequality and poverty. These countries spend far more on social projects than Canada does, yet they rate higher on many

indicators that measure economic competitiveness. There is no single model to follow, but the Scandinavian one is more inspiring than are the cuts in the financial exercise proposed by our government!

Claudette Carbonneau, president of CSN