

The attacks continue, but we're organizing to fight back



It's no surprise to find ourselves once again being bombarded with messages about the catastrophic state of public finances.

It's no surprise, because we've been hearing the same line for decades now, as predictable as snow in winter. Remember "living within our means" from the 1970s? Or Jacques Parizeau, who said he wanted to make us realize that the time for playing around was finished? In the 1980s, then-finance minister Gérard D. Lévesque told us that "we have to stop paying for groceries with borrowed money." More recently, there was Lucien Bouchard's "zero deficit"

and Jean Charest's infamous "reengineering." So there's nothing really new about Philippe Couillard saying that he "firmly believes" in the need to "make hard choices" to straighten out public finances, but especially to restore our credit rating!

We hear a lot about public debt, but never about household debt, even though according to the Canadian Payroll Association more than half of employees (51%) reported that it would hard for them to meet their financial obligations if their pay cheque was delayed by even one week. And then there's the budget deficit that must be wiped out at all costs, regardless of the social deficit that will be the result. Because, need we repeat, government services are useful above all for the most vulnerable members of society, or those who have suffered a hard blow. It's when you're poor or sick that these services are vital, not when you're rich and healthy, to repeat a tired old joke. Couillard's "hard choices" will necessarily be harder for some than for others.

To reach a zero deficit, we are told that there is no alternative to cutting back on government spending. It's out of the question to look at the revenue side of the balance sheet, even though there is \$10 billion worth of solutions on that side.¹ Which leaves us with austerity. For the government, fighting the deficit is omnipresent, creating tensions and economic sluggishness. It's no surprise that the austerity they are imposing on us will miss the target, and our politicians will call for even more austerity, like a dog chasing after its tail. And yet it's not because they don't know about the devastating effects of austerity measures. Recent conclusions by international organizations not known for being particularly progressive, like the International Monetary Fund (IMF), point precisely to this and show how ineffective such measures are.

It's up to us to present an alternative, to remove the ideological blinders from those who claim to govern us. Because recent history has also shown that our struggles give good reason to hope. Mass mobilizations forced Mr. Charest to give up on his reengineering and his astronomical hike in tuition. The attacks continue, and the resistance must continue too. Reject austerity!

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¹ Web site of the *Coalition opposée à la tarification et à la privatisation des services publics*: <http://www.nonauxhausses.org/outils/alternatives-fiscales-justes-et-equitables-pour-les-finances-publiques/>