

The Budget—Mr. Stevens

public? For example, if the government followed the same policy in respect of the Farm Credit Corporation, to which the minister made reference in his budget, this would mean that the farmers across this country who borrow from that corporation would get their loans virtually interest free instead of paying the 7 per cent or 8 per cent now being charged.

If the government followed the same proposal it intends in respect of Petro-Can this would mean that those who borrow from the Federal Business Development Bank, to which the minister also referred, would be able to get their loans at about half the cost they are currently paying.

If the government followed the same policy in respect of CMHC this would mean roughly a 20 per cent reduction in the amount of interest payable by those who have NHA mortgages at the present time.

The reason I have dealt with Petro-Can, and I intend to refer to it again later, is that we believe the \$1.5 billion venture the government proposes is ill-advised because there are better uses for that money. Think of what that amount of money would do to relieve the traffic congestion in some of our urban areas. Think of what it would do to help the servicing of raw land for home construction in the way of sewers, waterworks, and other items of a capital nature that our municipalities are so hard pressed to finance at the present time. I will have more to say about that later.

Let me come back to the gas tax. It is a harsh tax designed to raise additional revenue from the consumers who are already over-taxed by the federal government. Unfortunately this is a tax which will fall even more heavily on the poor than it will on the relatively rich, yet I suggest it is a tax that from an administration standpoint will be an impossibility. If you read the wording the minister used on Monday night concerning the administration of this tax, then you must ask yourself how it could possibly work with any degree of equity as between those who pay and those who do not.

The minister has stated he wishes to curb spending. I suggest it would be better if he curbed more spending and forgot about this tax. I have already mentioned that government spending during the last 40 months has jumped 99.5 per cent. In order to realize why we have such a spending increase it is only necessary to point out that the administration costs of this minister's own department in the same period have jumped 120 per cent, and I stress that this is only the administrative costs which have nothing to do with debt servicing or anything else handled by the Department of Finance. This is not a minister of restraint, this minister is simply a front for the big spending ministers in the Cabinet with him.

Let me set one other matter straight. In previous budgets the minister glibly talked about cutting people from the tax rolls. Back in 1972 the minister said, "We have knocked off a million taxpayers from the rolls". I should mention that the revenue department is catching up with the Minister of Finance as we are now getting the actual tax statistics regarding the number of taxpayers in this country. It is interesting to check on the minister's statement. As I have said, in 1972 he suggested there were one million cut off the tax rolls, and in 1973 he said there were another 750,000 dropped. Let me give you the facts. In 1971

there were 7.3 million Canadians paying taxes in this country.

Mr. Stanfield: Personal income taxes?

Mr. Stevens: Yes, personal income taxes. By 1972 a further 700,000 were paying taxes rather than one million being knocked off. By 1973 another 400,000 had been added to the tax rolls. So instead of this minister, or his predecessor, being responsible for eliminating 1¼ million people from the tax rolls this minister succeeded in the period for which we now have statistics in adding 1.1 million personal income tax payers to the tax rolls in this country. It is now estimated that nearly 10 million Canadians will be paying into the federal treasury this year compared to 7.3 million the year before the minister took office.

● (1550)

Mr. Turner (Ottawa-Carleton): There are one million more workers.

Mr. Stevens: In addition the minister claims he has been reducing the amount paid in income tax by the individual taxpayer, and yet we find that in each instance each and every year the amount paid by the individual taxpayer in this country has jumped, and that the number of taxpayers has increased.

From time to time the minister has spoken about recycling funds. It may be that he also has been recycling taxpayers. He takes them off the tax rolls at the beginning of the year only to add them back on at the end of the year.

I have touched on the matter of high interest rates and the fact that conventional rates are now 11¼ per cent. We believe the mortgage interest rate structure is simply part of an over-all national policy of high interest rates. We ask each member of this House why should our tenants and our homeowners carry on their backs the government's high interest rate policy? If it is in the national interest to have relatively high interest rates, certainly relative to the rest of the world, why should the brunt of this cost fall so heavily on the housing industry, an industry which has been in a slump, as the Minister of State for Urban Affairs would surely agree, and industry with a high component of unemployment among its workers? The fact is it is in a slump because of the government's policy.

The government's policy, or lack of policy, which is perhaps the more accurate expression, is one which shows it has no compassion for the poor, the retired, and those on fixed incomes. This government just has a passion for power. It has a passion for power for power's sake. We have seen evidence of this throughout this parliament. Personal ambitions run rampant while millions of Canadians, especially the poor, the consumers, are required to pay the price.

I have stated that we have had an undue growth in our money supply. On Monday night the minister made the same statement. He said that he does not intend to use harsh fiscal and monetary measures in order to curb inflation. I suggest there is no need to use harsh fiscal and monetary measures. What the minister should have done, and what he will have to do, is be responsible in his fiscal and monetary stand. If this minister, so long as he is