

Alleged Non-Institution of Just Society

opposition parties will agree on the duration of the debates for the benefit of the population.

[English.]

Hon. Herb Gray (Minister of National Revenue): Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a few brief remarks about the motion before us today. It raises a number of important questions of policy including basic income tax exemptions for individuals and the sales tax on building materials. These are matters of importance to Canadians generally. The government recognizes their importance as well as the importance of the question of a guaranteed annual income, also mentioned in the motion, and touched upon by the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Health and Welfare when he spoke earlier during the debate.

It can be said that the motion itself applies primarily to matters of fiscal policy. It is being presented to the House only three days before the Minister of Finance (Mr. Benson) presents his budget statement. For that reason, anyone on the treasury benches is extremely limited in any response he might make to the points brought forward during the debate on this opposition motion.

Ministers are limited in this way because of the iron-clad tradition, if I may call it that, of secrecy and confidentiality surrounding preparations of the budget prior to its presentation to the House by the Minister of Finance. Everyone on the treasury benches is obliged, because of this tradition, to refrain from saying anything that might be taken as a derogation of this principle of confidentiality.

The first spokesman for the Cr ditiste party in presenting this motion recognized this limitation when he said, and I think I paraphrase his opening remarks fairly, "We are putting forward this motion to better inform the government through our criticisms and our suggestions". In spite of these limitations I think I can assure the House that careful note has and will be taken of the points raised during this debate.

With reference to the remarks of the hon. lady speaking for the NDP earlier in this debate, let me say that, contrary to what she suggested, the measures for social programs to which she referred, were adopted and became law, through the efforts of, and were largely, if not entirely, presented to the House by Liberal governments whose majority position was such that they did not have to take these steps unless they and the members supporting them sincerely believed in and supported the programs in question.

● (5:00 p.m.)

Let me conclude therefore by saying that in the measures it has presented to this Parliament the government has made progress in achieving the goal—obviously a difficult one to achieve—of a just society. I am confident it will be successfully continuing its efforts for the purpose of achieving a just society with a strong and expanding economy.

[Mr. La Salle.]

[Translation]

Mr. C-A. Gauthier (Roberval): Mr. Speaker, I wish to speak in support of the motion proposed by one of my colleagues, which reads as follows:

That this House criticizes the government for having neglected to institute the just society in Canada, as was promised, and which should have been a reality for a long time; by refusing to increase the basic income tax exemption for individuals, by refusing to repeal the 11 per cent tax on building materials and by failing to institute a guaranteed annual income scheme.

As was just mentioned, it is clearly understood that what are called "opposition days" have the sole purpose of giving us an opportunity to express our views to the government. This is done by non-confidence motions, but it would be more correct to speak about justified critics and adequate proposals. I think that the old expression used is somewhat outmoded and does not express what we really mean.

As to the just society, one must ask what was meant by the word "just". One must consider the context. This slogan was first used during an election period, when people usually do not weigh their words. I always thought it meant a just society for the protection of one's friends, for the protection of the financial world.

If people understood "social justice", they have certainly been deceived on many counts. The intent of the motion before us is mainly to blame the government for having misled people as to the meaning of the term "just society". In fact, it was its own society, a small society open to very few, a society of high financial interests.

After reading today's newspapers, we realize right away that the just society promised during the last election campaign is probably in its most fatal stage because we may see in the months to come a fight to death between two good friends, at least behind the scenes. We might even see the moment of truth on this long war on taxation. I have always said that the struggle is directed exclusively toward the power of taxation; this is apparent from today's edition of *Montreal-Matin* wherein you can read the following:

Trudeau says no to Quebec

I think this is the strongest slap in the face Mr. Bourassa has ever received. It is written farther on:

Trudeau rejects Castonguay's plan

and I quote:

While stating that he does not adopt a negative attitude towards Quebec's requests in the field of social security, Prime Minister Pierre-Elliott Trudeau has rejected the Castonguay plan which would integrate all social policy programs under provincial jurisdiction. Mr. Trudeau stated that if such plan was adopted, it would entail the fragmentation of income security systems and that under the circumstances, the central government would not be interested in financing policies outside its sphere of legislative responsibility or administration.

That is exactly the crux of the matter. On one hand, you have an administrative matter, on the other, a taxation matter. The Prime Minister of Canada (Mr. Trudeau)