

Many times I have urged that, in so important a step, so crucial a development, the Island people should be consulted. They have never been asked to choose between this bridge and an efficient, modern ferry service. I believe that before this constitutional amendment is made final, the Island people should be consulted fairly and squarely on an issue so vital to their future. As for me, I continue to believe that this mega-project is a mega-blunder. I know that today, the bridge builders are ascendant and they are cheerful, and I do not want to dampen their parade in any way.

• (1610)

I cannot help but recall a great Englishman, the first Prime Minister of that mother of Parliaments, Sir Robert Walpole. When the war hawks were demanding that the British get into the war of Spanish succession and have some more killings, he delayed but finally he went along. As they danced in the streets and the church bells were ringing, old Walpole said: "They may ring their bells now. Before long they will be wringing their hands."

Hon. Gildas L. Molgat (Deputy Leader of the Government): Senator Macquarrie has been his usual eloquent and interesting self —

The Hon. the Speaker *pro tempore*: If the honourable senator speaks now, his speech will have the effect of closing the debate.

Senator Molgat: I wished to adjourn the debate for Senator Fairbairn who has some closing comments to make, so perhaps I will ask one of my colleagues to do so.

Hon. John B. Stewart: Honourable senators, Senator Macquarrie made reference to a proposed change in the design of the bridge. Has he been able to ascertain why that proposal, if indeed there is such a proposal, has been made? Is it to make the bridge more stable?

When Bill C-100 was before the committee, we were assured that the design of the structure had been perfected. What is the reason for this additional improvement? What assurance do we have that additional improvements will not be necessary? In other words, what information has the honourable senator been able to gather with regard to the proposal, if indeed there is a proposal, for a change in the design?

Senator Macquarrie: Honourable senators, if Senator Stewart is looking for assurance that everything is all right, he is coming to very much the wrong person. I am far from assured. In fact, I am fearful of what may be ahead.

I, too, remember the call of perfection, that everything was just fine. I can read only what I see before me, and it is unfortunate that in Prince Edward Island there is not balanced treatment in the media on this matter.

It seems that it has been said by spokesmen for the company — and that is pretty well the spokesmen for the department — that the change will make the drive easier. This is the very reason why I think a committee should be looking at this matter and finding out about these letters that are coming in. Someone has stated that he or she did not know whether or not there was a letter; someone else has stated that he or she was not sure if this

would require environmental research, or if it were so serious that one would have to get it through the Access to Information Act.

In other words, I do not know. I want to know. We would be far wiser legislators if we knew right now. There is no great hurry, as Senator Molgat has said, about this measure. At best, the bridge will not be completed before 1997.

On motion of Senator Hébert, debate adjourned.

THE BUDGET

STATEMENT OF MINISTER OF FINANCE—DEBATE CONTINUED

On the Order:

Resuming the debate on the inquiry of the Honourable Senator Phillips, calling the attention of the Senate to the Budget Statement made by the Minister of Finance on Tuesday, February 22, 1994.—(*Honourable Senator Graham*).

Hon. B. Alasdair Graham: Honourable senators, someone once said that you cannot step into the same river twice. If any country is like a river, it is this country. Canada is always changing and becoming something else, Morley Callaghan once observed. Today, if you listen carefully, you can almost hear the sound of a distant river's voice. The waters churn, the river runs deep; the currents can be treacherous. But the voice of the river is a harbinger of hope. The transition is coming and Canada, our country, is becoming something else.

For a long time, many of us had lost heart. Many of us have been demoralized and indifferent. There have been many reasons for this. The problems we face as a nation have appeared irresolvable. Look at our combined debt. It stands at approximately \$650 billion and, if one works it out, that means about \$100,000 for each family of four. We are now prisoners of the Draconian laws of compound interest. The interest alone on our accumulated foreign debt is about \$25 billion a year, and one third of our federal tax revenue goes to pay it.

We have been told recently that Canada's international competitiveness is declining rapidly in comparison with that of other OECD countries. In fact, the statistics have spoken of what some people have referred to as our "humiliation" over the last few years. They have spoken of a country which, in the eyes of many, was not prepared to take front row seats on the playing field of a new age.

Here at home, a 49-per-cent tax rate has contributed to the agony of the middle class. It has driven more and more Canadians into the underground economy which was referred to yesterday by Senator Murray. That economy has been estimated to be as high as \$50 billion — the equivalent of one million people each earning \$50,000 a year of untaxed income.

Recently, we thought we saw relief as Statistics Canada demonstrated that unemployment insurance benefits were down 5.2 per cent from last year's record \$19.3 billion. The underlying