

Excise Tax Act

The Hon. Member for Mississauga South, the chairman of the finance committee, said that this would be an incredible tax grab, essentially a printing press for money.

Mr. Reid: He said that before the election.

Mr. Riis: Before the election. Now that he has been made chairman he toned it down somewhat. He still stands by his words.

This will be a massive tax grab by an illegitimate Minister in a Budget that should not proceed, through legislation that we should not be debating.

How does this affect our international reputation? What do countries throughout the world think about Canada when they see its Government loading such an incredible debt on working Canadians, a small portion of the population, while letting others go tax exempt? What does it say about a Minister of Finance and a Government that will do nothing about these leaks of budget information to privileged people in advance?

The best barometer to judge this is the money markets. There was a downward movement of the Canadian dollar as a reflection of the loss of faith in the Minister. I assume they are waiting for him to resign. They will be waiting for that good news for a long time.

We oppose Bill C-20, even its title. Normally, the Opposition opposes various clauses of a Bill. However, when we are eventually asked if we support the title of this Bill, we will have to say no because it is not accurate. The title should read: "A massive Canadian Government tax grab of working families". We hope that government Members will speak for their constituents, do the honourable thing and vote against this Bill so we will not have to examine it clause by clause in committee.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre H. Vincent (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, I welcome this opportunity to speak to Bill C-20, a Bill that will increase certain taxes. When we look at tax increases, we wonder, and I am sure Canadians are wondering, why we have these tax increases. Why did the Government take a step that is not necessarily very popular? I don't think many Canadians are delighted to hear they will have to pay more taxes. So why? Because, Mr. Speaker, and we often forget this, because the figures involved are enormous!

• (1240)

We must remember that in 1984, when this Government was elected, the national debt, in other words, the money Canada owed, was \$200 billion. In other words, before 1984, over the years from, let us say, 1968 to 1984, the Government of the time annually spent more money than it was receiving in the Treasury, and it did that for 20 years, leaving the Conservative Government which took its place a bill for \$200 billion. I often hear Opposition Members say: Yes, but you made it even worse. I agree, Mr. Speaker, that the national debt has increased by \$120 billion since 1984, but if we calculate the interest charges paid annually since 1984 on their debt, these charges add up to \$120 billion. So since 1984, if we exclude the interest charges on the debt that was a legacy from the previous Government, this government has had a balanced budget practically every year. However, we now have a situation where our debt is \$320 billion.

Expressed in figures more readily understood by you and me, this means 3 million per hour. Our national debt, the money Canada owes, is increasing by \$3 million per hour or \$80 million every day, just because a previous Government spent a lot more money than it was able to collect. So now, Mr. Speaker, we have a situation where some very vigorous concrete measures must be taken if we are to control our annual deficit and the national debt, which has grown to enormous proportions.

Last week I was talking to people in the riding of Trois-Rivières, as the Hon. Member for the NDP said, to small business people, Mr. Speaker, people who have a business and employees, and so forth, who are aware of the national debt problem, and who are in favour of the measures that have been taken, although they realize they will have to pay a little more.

The Canadian people, Mr. Speaker, want a Government whose first goal is a healthy economy, because a healthy economy means new jobs, and new jobs in turn mean bread and butter for everybody. And if we are to have a healthy economy and new jobs, the starting point is good management putting our own house in order. This is what the last Budget is all about. This is what has been done with increases in certain taxes—19 per cent on liquor. I am not aware of anyone opposing increased taxes on liquor and tobacco products. Nine per cent on building materials is still less than the general federal