

Income Tax Act

light, an attempt to be constructive and an attempt to give the House the benefit of our wisdom. I always say that this is done for the Canadian people, not for myself, not for my party, not for the opposition and not for the Liberals. It would be well for members on the other side to read Sir Kenneth Wheare on the role of the opposition. I was pleased to note that the hon. member who just preceded me was at least relevant. Yesterday we heard the maniacal ravings of several members whose comments were meaningless and irrelevant. They spoke just to berate the opposition and to harass us, and they were supported by asinine interjections from their gleeful but immature supporters.

I am interested in the motion put forward by the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre because it affects some five million people. This is where the action is. This is what the Senate Committee on Poverty is all about—five million people who are worried about the steady decrease in the value of the dollar. They are concerned about the cost of living which is continually rising, and all of this when we have a gross national product of \$90 billion. Sometimes I wonder why we continue this debate because we have been told—and this is becoming a classical joke around here—that some lawyers would like this bill to be passed immediately because they have found some 145 loopholes in it.

I am interested in the proposal made by the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre because what he is really talking about is taxing wealth. In his submissions he tried to impress the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance (Mr. Mahoney) as well as the Minister of Finance (Mr. Benson) himself and all his colleagues on the other side that what we are doing right now is living in the 1920's because, as was pointed out so admirably yesterday—and it was the first time that I heard this brought to the attention of the House—in the late 1920's the exemption for single persons was \$1,200 and for married people it was \$2,400. Here we are on December 15, 1971 and the exemptions for single persons amount to \$1,500 and for married people they are \$2,850. What progress is that? It is ridiculous. It is utter nonsense. That is why I believe that there is great merit in the motion of the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre.

The motion of the hon. member amends section 117 (1) which, in effect, says that a person who has a taxable income of \$500 will pay 17 per cent. What I find so attractive in the motion is that it would take \$75 off a person's tax; in other words, he would be paying \$10 in tax. Then, it is stated throughout paragraphs (b) to (m) that \$75 will be taken off the immediate figure relating to the tax payable in the first instance without the percentage. What it really means is a \$75 across the board decrease in taxes. What is important is that it affects those who are most in need. This is why I find this system more attractive than the system which the parliamentary secretary praises so highly, that is the deductions system.

Deductions, with all their merit, do not improve the position of those in the lower income brackets. The parliamentary secretary is interested in the scheme because, if I read *Hansard* correctly, he says that Carter himself would have liked a system of deductions together with a tax credit scheme. If I am wrong, the parliamentary secretary will correct me, but let him check *Hansard*. Even Carter

[Mr. Alexander.]

found merit in the system. This is why I am interested in this motion. It is a legitimate, sincere attempt to alleviate the suffering of some 5 million people who, because of numerous factors and I do not need to repeat them, are living on or below the poverty line. It would give them some relief. It would also stimulate the economy because of the amount of tax cut involved. But more than that, it is a fair method to approach this very controversial subject. You have it right across the board.

• (3:40 p.m.)

We are legislators, Mr. Speaker, and we are human. Some people may not really believe that we are human. Although perfection is rarely a human quality, one would expect that when a government introduced legislation of the magnitude of this bill, breaking new ground, the bill would be about as perfect as possible. Mr. Speaker, this monstrosity is far from perfect, as the government well knows. This fact is proven by the several amendments it has produced for our consideration and, what is even more astounding, by the announcements that amendments affecting vital portions of it are to be brought in after the bill is passed. This is where I take issue with the government. The government tells us, "Pass the bill and restore confidence in the economy." I ask myself how is this possible? If the minister is going to introduce significant amendments subsequent to the passage of the bill, how in heaven's name can any one know how to face the future? Yet the government has the unmitigated gall to continue to tell us to pass the bill, and that everything will be all right. As my hon. friend from Kent-Essex says, "Pass now and change later." This is a ridiculous approach.

In its arrogance, the government introduced closure. I don't care if anyone wants to call it time allocation. I think that is the wrong expression. It is closure, plain and simple. So far as I am concerned, we did not have the opportunity to discuss this bill in the way that it should have been discussed. We know that a vast number of sections have not been perused by Members of Parliament. I see the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance (Mr. Mahoney) smiling—

Mr. Mahoney: Why don't you talk about them instead of bellyaching?

Mr. Alexander: —in his usual, genial way. But after that I am afraid I will have to continue to tell him to please be respectful when the hon. member for Hamilton West is speaking. That is as nice a way as I can put it, without having to tell him to shut his mouth, as I did earlier. This was a disgraceful statement for me to make and I apologize for being carried away.

At a time when we should be dealing with legislation that would ensure economic growth, full employment, confidence in the economy, and appreciation of the United States' position regarding its domestic problems, we are called upon to deal with a bill that seemingly ignores all of these things. Such an attitude, which is dangerous and irresponsible, is not acceptable on this side of the House because, primarily, the Canadian people expect and demand more maturity. Such an attitude borders on insanity, and raises doubts about the ability of the government to deal with a matter of such magnitude. The