

Does the minister forget that the public treasury must be managed with wisdom, without any influence reflecting the colour of the distributor?

Has the minister forgotten that, as a Crown minister, he is first and foremost the servant of the people and not a Caesar who gives arrogantly and says: Accept because I am Caesar.

Mr. Speaker, on reviewing the speech and studying more thoroughly the legislation brought forward, I wondered whether there really was something to be so proud about. All I need do is reread the hundreds of letters I receive, like other hon. members, to be able to say that the measly allowance granted to senior citizens seems to be an extremely shabby measure to hundreds of Canadians.

When the minister tells us about an increase in his budget, an increase in allowances, he forgets that other increases have also taken place; he forgets that unemployment in this country has reached a record high. As a matter of fact, the rate of unemployment in the province of Quebec has reached 10.2 per cent.

The minister also forgets that the cost of living now stands at an unprecedented level in this country, an aspect which should hang in the balance when the minister brags about his own bill.

Mr. Speaker, my intention is not to give a detailed analysis on this measure. Besides it has been done quite competently and intelligently by my colleague, the hon. member for Hillsborough (Mr. Macquarrie). I would still like to say why we have so much set our heart on this cause of the golden age people, and why we must give so much attention to it.

First, it is a matter of justice. If we consider the position of older people, we must remember the hard work, the sacrifices, the devotion, the taxes they paid, the services they gave and the devotion they showed, for we would not want all that to have been done for nothing.

These people have given us a much better society than the one they had known. They have endowed us with the material comfort which enables successive generations to progress and get better chances of success. They have left us, for instance, their daily experience, their way of living, all this moral heritage revealed by the traditional worth of our people: work, honesty, quest for perfection, faith. They gave wholeheartedly their health, their welfare so as to leave us with a country measuring up to their hopes.

In return, Mr. Speaker, the most elementary justice requires that we permit them, at this awkward age beginning at 60 to enjoy life just like all other Canadians. This is a question of justice, but also of gratitude.

Gratitude stands among the noblest feelings in the heart of man, and we from Quebec have a motto that we like to repeat: I remember. We remember not only the past, our inheritance, but we are pleased on the occasion of the consideration of this bill to say that we also remember aged people.

It is all very nice, on certain anniversaries, on New Year's Eve, to offer our wishes to our parents, to wish them a long life, but I think that what should express our feelings are neither words nor compliments, but indeed

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positive and concrete actions. We have now reached the point where we can stop talking and do something.

It is also a matter of humanitarianism, Mr. Speaker. It is easy to show compassion for under-developed countries. It is a good indication that we are not fenced in our own country and that we are looking to the world beyond.

We are quick to bring assistance to countries suffering from disasters such as earthquakes, erupting volcanoes or other things. And this is good.

A reconstruction program for North and South Viet Nam which have been ravaged by war for 40 years is now underway. There is agreement to finance this program costing billions of dollars which is good and worthy of praise.

There was even some thought given to prisoners today. During the question period, there were some comments on what is going on in penitentiaries. Authorities agree that penal institutions should be made more conducive to prisoners rehabilitation and reintegration into society. We are willing to spend \$8,000 annually for each prisoner. And this is good. There are principles which warrant it. And yet when we Canadians deal with the golden age problems there is stinginess, there are delays, all kinds of pretexts are put forward, the budget is scrutinized and we start talking about priorities. That is a priority issue, Mr. Speaker.

Prior to structures, thorough consideration must be given human persons. I am all in favor of shipbuilding, ecology, highway construction and more embassies. But, there is after all the daily life of those men and women who have reached an age where they need the attention of the government.

That is why, Mr. Speaker, I am not the least ashamed to say that I will fight to my last breath for those people to whom I have promised it. I might also say that those people are in need of a basic, civilized pension. I have promised to fight for the progressive lowering of the eligible age to 60 so that even this year those who are 64 can receive it. As promised, I am asking the government either to amend the bill or to introduce another measure also beneficial to the spouse of a person already receiving a pension, in the sense that such a spouse be also entitled to the pension.

Mr. Speaker, this government—

Mr. Cyr: And the provinces.

Mr. Wagner: I just heard an hon. member on the government side say: And the provinces. He also is echoing the Minister of National Health and Welfare who seeks by all means, all excuses, all arguments to refuse to recognize the natural rights of those who have reached the golden age.

I am coming to the provinces.

I would like to tell you, Mr. Speaker, that this government will thus have refused to increase old age security beyond the basic amount of \$100. Any proposals along those lines, according to the Minister of National Health and Welfare, and I quote:

... would cost the federal treasury many more billions of dollars a year.