

The Budget—Mr. Caouette

[Translation]

Mr. Réal Caouette (Témiscamingue): Mr. Speaker, an amendment and a subamendment to the budget brought down Monday night by the Minister of Finance (Mr. Turner) are now before the House.

The amendment simply states, and I quote:

While acknowledging certain beneficial provisions in the budget proposals,—

—no doubt a reference to the increased old age pensions—
—this House regrets the failure of the government to bring forth effective measures to relieve unemployment, to provide incentive for Canadian investment in Canadian development or to propose personal tax relief for stimulation of the economy.

And the subamendment states that this House believes that a substantial reduction in personal income tax on low and middle incomes should replace the tax cuts and other handouts to corporations.

I think three main points stand out in the budget: First, old age pensions are increased from \$135 to \$150 a month for single people and to \$285 a month for married couples. Secondly, help is given to students, who are granted monthly deductions of \$50 to further their studies. Thirdly, corporations are helped by getting tax cuts, tax concessions or incentives in the amount of \$500 million, in order to stimulate the Canadian economy.

• (1700)

First of all, Mr. Speaker, I shall deal with the matter of senior citizens. In 1970, more precisely on May 4, the following motion was introduced in the House by the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles):

That this House calls upon the government to give consideration to an immediate and substantial increase in the basic amount of the old age security pension and in veterans' pensions and allowances, and this House also urges that still further steps be taken to improve the quality of life of all our older and retired people.

That motion was introduced on May 4 and, on the occasion of the debate on the proposal, I said, as recorded at page 6536 of *Hansard*, and I quote:

Why not pay \$150 pensions to old people? I remember that in 1962, when the old age security pension was \$65 a month and that my colleagues and I called for it to be raised to \$100, we were literally told that we were crazy, that we were asking for the moon.

Now, in 1970, the same pension has reached \$111.41 a month. This means that the government is crazier then we were then by \$11.41 a month.

The question remains the same: Where will the money come from? When it was decided to increase the pension of hon. members, did anyone ask where would the money come from? Nobody did. The raise was approved. It was like an electronic system—so smoothly it went through.

And on page 6538 of *Hansard*, one can read the following:

Mr. Speaker, all this to say that the motion as drafted is very much acceptable. We support its intent because all the people and groups mentioned in the motion interest us to the utmost.

For many years now, we have been asking for \$150 per month for old age pensions.

Now, on the same day, that motion was put to a vote and it is surprising to see to what extent an opinion can evolve over a period of two years. At that time, nine of my colleagues and I voted for increasing the old age security

pension. We supported the motion of the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre. Among those who voted against it, I see the names of the Minister of Regional Economic Expansion (Mr. Marchand), of the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) and of the Minister of Finance (Mr. Turner). All three voted against the motion because it was allegedly impossible to raise the pensions. Why has it now become possible, with a larger number of unemployed and an economy more unstable than ever?

Mr. Marchand (Langelier): That is not true.

Mr. Caouette: How is it that we were ridiculed in 1970, whereas, today, the government is introducing this very legislation?

Mr. Marchand (Langelier): He will say anything.

Mr. Caouette: Mr. Speaker, we intend to support this measure. I already said so yesterday in no uncertain terms. This is why I remarked on the night of the budget speech that I had never seen a government prove us so right, we *Créditistes* who for 30 years have been asking for a better deal for senior citizens as well as for all classes of society.

Mr. Speaker, in his budget speech, the minister forgot to speak of the increase in the national debt. He did not say that it amounted to \$16,943 million as at March 31, 1970, to \$17,360 million by March 31, 1971 and to \$17,922 million by March 31, 1972.

Nor did he say that the interest on our debt in 1970-71 was \$1,880,000,000; in 1971-72, \$2,030,000,000 and it will be \$2,260,000,000 in 1972-73.

I hope that members of the press gallery will mention this: \$2,260,000,000 which represent \$6,191,100 per day in interest alone on the national debt.

The hon. Minister of Regional Economic Expansion nods to me that we must pay it. We have to.

When his illustrious colleague, the hon. Secretary of State (Mr. Pelletier) is asked whether he can spare a few dollars for the Opportunities for Youth program, he replies to our young people: "It is too bad, we have already received 19,000 projects". He sends that same letter all the time. I quote:

I regret to advise you that your project cannot be subsidized this year. The 1972 Opportunities for Youth program created a tremendous interest and more than 19,000 projects were submitted to us. Budget limitations—

For the interest on the national debt, there is no budgetary limit. We must pay. I keep on quoting:

Budget limitations unfortunately compelled us to make a choice out of the thousands of applications that met with the program's general eligibility criteria.

We cannot even find out what those general criteria are. We ask the minister what they are and he answers: I don't know, my departmental officers know it. But he is the one who signs the letter, not some civil servant.

I quote once more:

Therefore after carefully studying all applications, we had to turn down projects of undoubtable value and interest.

I wish to thank you and your friends—