

Medicare

Mr. Speaker: Order please.

Mr. Caouette: I am through, Mr. Speaker; let the minister do his quibbling alone.

Mr. J.-A. Mongrain (Trois-Rivières): Mr. Speaker, I had no intention of speaking on this bill since I have already done so, but so many conflicting opinions have been expressed this evening that I feel duty bound to say a few words.

First of all, Mr. Speaker, I am almost tempted at the outset of my remarks to ask you or one of your clerks, to pass around the house and collect an amusement tax after the performance just given by the member for Villeneuve (Mr. Caouette).

Mr. Caouette: Mr. Speaker, I raise a point of order. I have been told on several occasions that the member for Trois-Rivières (Mr. Mongrain) enjoys very much making fun of the member for Villeneuve. I rise on both a point of order and a question of privilege. For the information of the house, I must say this, Mr. Speaker. Even though the member was mayor of Trois-Rivières, not Three Rivers, but Trois-Rivières, I have no lesson to take from him and when I have something to say, I have no intention of asking his permission to say it either.

Mr. Mongrain: Mr. Speaker, I would not be so bold as to think that I can give lessons to the member for Villeneuve. But I note that every time the hon. member rises in this house, he pokes fun at almost everybody; I do not think he would want to deny us the same pleasure.

It may have happened a few times that I chaffed him when he was in the house, and I was rather sorry to see he was not here because his retorts are just as amusing as his interventions. It struck me when he said he had never heard so much nonsense as this evening. I do not know about whom he was speaking, because I would not want to insult him by qualifying his remarks as nonsense, but I would be using somewhat his own words if I said that I have seldom heard so much rambling as during his speech tonight.

Mr. Speaker, to make things clear, I will vote with the hon. member for Villeneuve in favour of the amendment. I am going to vote for the amendment tonight. However, I would tell my Quebec colleagues that I have found that the general discussion has been ungracious, and perhaps irrelevant. First, the real question was departed from. We should have

[Mr. Caouette.]

debated an amendment making provision for fiscal compensation for the provinces, all provinces, not wishing to participate in this plan. This discussion, which should have been serious, turned into a debate on things which, in my view, were outside the scope of the amendment. It reached a point—I think I will use the words of the minister—where the same old themes were harped upon. And they were brought in rather clumsily.

I do not think that tonight's debate furthered the interests of the province of Quebec or the cause of national unity. Some grossly exaggerated statements were made. We heard about stealing funds, about cowardice, about traitors, about all kinds of words, even about people who sold their province.

Mr. Speaker, I think that good will requires that all hon. members in this house should give our colleagues at least the benefit of the doubt, and think that they are at least as sincere and objective as we are. Personally, when I deem it necessary to object to a statement made by an hon. member from a western province, an English-speaking province, who does not understand the point of view of the province of Quebec, I would blame myself for accusing him of such a thing, because I solemnly and sincerely believe that he is probably a Canadian of good will like myself who does not share my views perhaps but who deserves that I should respect his views. And, in any case, I would certainly not convince him to accept my point of view if I called him a coward, a traitor.

I apologize for that digression—it is because I found the whole thing hard to bear and particularly ungracious. Colleagues of mine from the province of Quebec tore each other to pieces before the rest of the country. We should wash our dirty linen somewhere else.

We should decide together if we support that amendment that promises fiscal adjustments to the provinces which, for one reason or another, cannot accept the legislation.

In theory, Mr. Speaker, I support it. And I will vote for it because I think that it will not delay the passing of the present bill. I have already had occasion to say that I supported the present bill because I am not one of those who believe that constitutional questions which drag on indefinitely, and about which constitutional experts seldom agree, must deprive Canadians of the advantages which that legislation can bring.

I do not say it is urgent that we should settle that question at last, but I think that