

Mr. Duplessis said that it was fundamental to the autonomy of Quebec. You cannot have it both ways. Either you sign a collection agreement with the federal government or you do not. We have not had any counter-offer. They have merely tried to force me to send them a cheque. I am not sending a cheque to the other provinces in which I have vacated the tax field. Of course, it is a difficult situation.

Because I believe in our institutions and in the good faith of those who are elected across this land, regardless of political stripe, I did this. Perhaps I was too generous in believing that in economic and fiscal matters I could deal in good faith with everybody. Unfortunately, it is not possible. However, I will keep trying—

**Some hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Chrétien:** —because I believe one of the problems in this land is that we are destroying a very necessary instrument, the national government. That is extremely important. At this moment, I am not comfortable as Minister of Finance of this country. I will not be partisan or political in the sense of raising the problem in Quebec.

I compared the books of the province of Newfoundland with the books of the province of Alberta, both of which have Conservative governments, and it made me extremely uncomfortable. The highest sales tax in the land is in Newfoundland. There is no sales tax in Alberta. The highest tax on gasoline is in Newfoundland. There is none in Alberta. Most of the taxes that exist in Newfoundland do not exist in Alberta. That is good for Alberta. However, in a country like Canada, is it not normal to have a federal government strong enough to help those who are poor with the money of those who are rich?

**Some hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Chrétien:** I came to this House 15 years ago. Some people outside this place say that I have moved to the right. I do not mind when they say that. I try to do what is right. However, when I came to this House it was because I believed in distribution. There was no medicare. All sorts of programs were lacking. I have been associated with many of the programs which were initiated by Mr. Pearson and by the present Prime Minister. This week, if I am not mistaken—I speak from memory—the OECD stated that this year the level of income per capita in Canada is above that of the United States.

● (1712)

**Mr. Stevens:** Read the whole report.

**Mr. Chrétien:** We are surpassed only by Switzerland and Sweden. Bearing in mind the kind of land in which we live, with its provinces running 4,000 miles from coast to coast and another 4,000 miles from Windsor to the North Pole, and considering what we have managed to achieve in the last 110 years, I am proud to be a Canadian.

**Some hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

### *Income Tax Act*

**Mr. Chrétien:** I am proud to try to find ways to keep our country as it is and to bridge the gap between the rich and the poor. If I did not risk my skin, I would be at rest with my conscience—

**Some hon. Members:** Oh, oh!

**Mr. Chrétien:** Members opposite can laugh. For years I have been a member of this House and I have devoted six years, one month, three days and two hours to trying to solve the problems of the weakest in our society, the Eskimo and the Indian.

**Mr. Paproski:** Who is laughing?

**An hon. Member:** We are all Canadians.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Turner):** The Minister of Finance has the floor. This is going to be a long debate and we shall all have our turn.

**Mr. Chrétien:** I have done it because I believe this country can offer something that is different. One of the proudest moments in my life was when one day I took the taxpayers' money to help an Eskimo print the first book in the Eskimo language ever printed in the world. We believed it was important that the smallest minority in this land should keep its language and its culture for generations to come.

I can take a lot of abuse from the opposition. I do not mind. But I will do my duty as I believe is right. It is to try to find a new formula in order to achieve greater equality in this nation. Perhaps we shall have to change the constitution. The Prime Minister has spoken often on that subject. I will just tell the House that I think we are on a dangerous course at this moment.

**Some hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Stevens:** You put us there!

**Mr. Chrétien:** Some people are willing to make any compromise but I am not. This measure is a just measure. We are not penalizing the people of Quebec at all. We are not discriminating against other provinces. Members over there can introduce all the nuances they like, but basically this measure is sound. I have talked with the ministers of finance of the land, excluding Mr. Parizeau, and I have talked with my colleagues. They are uncomfortable with it, but—

**Some hon. Members:** Oh, oh!

**Mr. Chrétien:** I tried before. I talked to them. I will meet them again. I will try to carry out this duty. As Minister of Finance I must try to bring about, in conjunction with the provinces, an economic policy. That is an avenue which has to be explored. Of course, it has given me some problems, but not problems I am afraid of. I can face problems and difficulties. What I am concerned about are sensible solutions.

I should like to compensate the people of Quebec. I do not want them to lose. If the Quebec government wants to raise its