

*The Budget—Mr. Jamieson*

bers of the academic community tend to look on the whole business of government planning with the same kind of subjective vision. I observe that their approach tends to be based on a consideration of whose ox is getting gored.

You will remember, Mr. Speaker, as will hon. members, that in 1968-69 this government undertook a very exhaustive reappraisal of all levels of government spending. It was one of the most comprehensive exercises of the type in which I, personally, have been engaged. There were no sacred cows. We looked at such things as science policy and what we wanted out of it and the rate of growth in the Public Service. We looked at certain make-work programs and questioned whether we were getting an adequate return for the money spent. We examined various levels of subsidy for everything ranging from that to wool growers to that for salt for the Newfoundland fisherman. We looked at certain services which were being provided, asked if they were being charged for at a return which was fair and also if those services perhaps could be abandoned. In other words, we went across the whole spectrum of government spending and, in effect, attempted to answer the charge that once something is embedded in terms of a government operation there is no way in which you can get rid of it.

What was the inevitable result of the exercise? We discovered and this House discovered that whatever the program was that had been introduced by the government, and at whatever stage, somewhere in the country there was a vested interest dedicated to the preservation of that program. Indeed, we had an extremely difficult job, as all hon. members will recall, implementing those proposals which were designed in our judgment, and I believe that the judgment has been supported, to achieve certain economies and to give the government more flexibility to meet additional demands. I believe that this gives rise to one clear-cut observation, namely, that there is a distinct ambivalence in the Canadian character. I believe that applies to virtually all of us in this country.

On the one hand, we subscribe completely to the principle that we must have prosperity for everybody. We can support in principle programs that are designed to achieve greater regional development, to provide for a greater degree of national unity and which, actually, will do all the other things that are so popular in their theoretical form that nobody would be against them. On the other hand, when it comes to the question of how these are to be paid for, that is where our unity, in this sense, flounders. We all begin to look at projects subjectively and to say in effect that, of course, it is all right to abandon this or that project if it does not relate to us, to our electors, to our business or whatever the case may be, but that what we ourselves are involved in is sacrosanct and cannot be changed. Let me say in defence of that position that there is a good deal of logic in having a gradual form of change in terms of government policy. At any given moment in time, because of the interlocking nature of our society, because the public and private sectors are involved in very many things on which both have an influence, any drastic shift in government policy

inevitably is going to cause major disruptions. Thousands, perhaps millions of people, will have geared their operations or lives or businesses, or whatever may be the case, to the status quo. Therefore, because of this interrelationship I have referred to between public and private sectors it is exceedingly difficult to extricate one from the other or for the government to change things very dramatically or drastically. I think it is fair to say that tax reform represents a case in point.

• (12:50 p.m.)

Over the best part of a decade there has been a fairly uniform kind of attitude toward the concept of tax reform. When one was talking about it in the abstract, when in fact it was represented by the Carter commission or subsequent to that by the white paper on taxation when it was presented as a kind of theoretical base, then, of course, it was quite possible for all of us to say yes, we subscribe to this, it represents and reflects a good deal of equity and so on. We all know what happened subsequent to that. Incidentally, I reject the idea advanced by some that it was only the vested interests, in a sense, who were concerned about it. When it was examined by people at all levels in society, it was discovered that the theory which appeared to be so attractive was nevertheless one in which implementation was going to cause a degree of disruption in the country that simply was not tolerable if introduced so rapidly and in too large a package at the same time.

I do not believe that the criticisms that are advanced with regard to the very excellent final conclusions reached by the Minister of Finance (Mr. Benson) are justified. In the first instance, if nothing else happened as a result of the taxation white paper, one principle is now accepted which was not accepted previously. When the government says that it is putting forward proposals or a range of options to the public with a view not only to getting representations but being prepared to be influenced by them, it means what it says. That is a very good principle to come out of this particular exercise for all of us. More and more we are going to have to do that.

This House and the members of this government are not the repositories of all wisdom and knowledge. Sometimes when I see people get up in the House and sound as if they know all the answers to everything under the sun and look pained when anybody criticizes anything that they advance, I am reminded of the poet Gibran who said, "Say not that ye have found the truth. Say that ye have found a truth." The fact of the matter is that in the complex world in which we live today it is not given to any of the members opposite or on this side to have all the answers to everything.

Furthermore, it is increasingly important that when governments are going to undertake major changes in the status quo and are going to change a pattern that has been in existence for a very long time, it is quite appropriate and, indeed, almost mandatory, for a government to put these proposals forward in a manner that will inform the public so that they can comment upon them and for the government to be impressed and to change in response to these representations. I do not say for one

[Mr. Jamieson.]