

Main Estimates

● (1532)

If you compare expenditures for the coming year with expenditures for the fiscal year just ending, the increase this coming year over the last year is 12.96 per cent, or close enough to 13 per cent for the government to make the honest claim that spending this year is going up by 13 per cent. That is not restraint, and it is flim-flam to claim anything else.

This document is full of flim-flam. There was the claim that last year the increase was only 8.2 per cent. The minister said there were structural adjustments and the increase might have been 10 per cent, which is the same as this year. The structural adjustment which he was able to claim on behalf of the government, the great restraint in growth of only 8.2 per cent, was in fact the transferral of the burden on the provincial governments, amounting to \$1 billion.

At the bottom of page 4 of the minister's statement he states how the government has had to cut the fat. What it has done is to take the cherry off the top of a double malted deluxe chocolate sundae. On page 6 there is an attempt to blame the provinces for the increase. The minister states that if it were not for all these funds which we have to send to the provinces, our growth rate would only be 4.8 per cent in increased expenditures. Every one of the programs referred to is a federal one. They are in areas of provincial jurisdiction and the provinces are administering them, but they are federal government programs, and to blame the increase on the provinces is plain flim-flam.

At the bottom of page 6 of the minister's statement there is an attempt to blame the recipients of social benefits, old age pensioners, and those whose benefits have increased by \$926 million this year. The reason those expenditures have had to go up is to allow those persons to have an opportunity to catch up on inflation caused by the profligate spending of this government over the last decade. It is a chicken and egg situation. You caused the inflation through profligate spending, and the result is that sort of increase. But the implication that somehow these persons who receive social benefits are to blame and are at fault for increased government spending is, in my opinion, irresponsible and plain flim-flam. I do not think the Canadian public is going to buy that medicine.

We do not think the medicine which the flim-flam man is trying to sell us will cure the problems facing the country. It will not make us well, it will make us sick, and we strongly suggest that the President of the Treasury Board look at the debate of February 2 when our party laid down part of a program which, if implemented, will result in substantial reductions in government spending. I would advise the government to take a look at some of the speeches given by my leader and others in my party indicating what it is possible to do, and I would also advise the government to do something about the estimates procedures. In a sense, the whole thing is an exercise in flim-flam.

Parliament has no real control over government spending. All we can do is expose the situation to a little light. In fact the funds are committed. It is a charade to suggest that parliamentary approval will be given, because we have no opportu-

[Mr. Andre.]

nity whatsoever to influence the spending habits of this government. The only resource people have if they want to put spending under control is to change governments, which I hope they will do.

I would also like to re-emphasize the importance of the government and the Treasury Board dealing with the recommendations of the Auditor General respecting the form of the estimates. As the Auditor General stated in 1975, and in 1976, and in 1977, the procedure for passing the estimates is totally hopeless in terms of providing parliament with an opportunity for meaningful examination. Let me quote paragraph 2.18 in the latest Auditor General's report. It reads:

... a comprehensive study be made with a view to revamping the form of the estimates so that the information they contain would be more meaningful and useful to parliament and so that the approved estimates would be the cornerstone for a fully effective government expenditure control system ...

If we are going to bring government expenditure under control, we must do something with the estimates procedure, with this charade and flim-flam in which we engage every year with apparently little impact upon the spending habits of this profligate government.

Mr. Max Saltzman (Waterloo-Cambridge): Mr. Speaker, it is a pretty sad and perverse document we have been handed today which holds no promise that the government either understands, or cares to deal with, the serious problem and scandal of unemployment.

I should like to paraphrase the minister's statement to make it read in a more likely way when he says that the statement today reflects the government's determination to ensure that Canada's economic recovery will be sustained and that the growth trend of federal spending will remain below the growth trend of the gross national product. Unfortunately, about the only thing that the statement seems determined to do is to make sure that this country continues at the highest level of unemployment in its history. This is an irony and I do not blame the hon. member for Calgary Centre (Mr. Andre) for being upset. I am upset myself, but for other reasons. I can see why the hon. member for Calgary Centre would be upset because, when the election comes, we will have the strange picture of the Liberal party running on the Tory platform.

Make no mistake, Mr. Speaker, what the government has done is to cut its expenditures. It is fine to say that the government has not done it and to point to the growth in some of the figures, but in real terms expenditure has been cut, and to that extent the stimulation that is required in the economy has been reduced. At one time the Liberals used to have better taste; they used to steal ideas from the NDP. But now all we see is the government rushing as fast as it can into a Conservative position.

The problem extends beyond what has been tabled today by the President of the Treasury Board (Mr. Andras). There is a current wave of conservatism in this country which has placed the total burden of responsibility for unemployment and slow growth on government spending. It is the new and mistaken orthodoxy of our day, and the government has bought this error holus-bolus in an effort to appease the electorate. Rather