

### *Heavy Water Production*

considerations became paramount as far as the government was concerned. Even though the interference would be difficult to document in many cases because of the nature of the intervention, the intervention was nevertheless real. In those circumstances, of course, the cost to the Canadian taxpayer rises very substantially.

It is not only in cases where ownership is involved that the expenditure of public funds increases due to political intervention. As I stated a few seconds ago there are other examples as well. One that is currently in the news is the Department of Regional Economic Expansion. As a matter of fact, I have said on other occasions, and repeat today, that I question the necessity for this department of government at all. I am not the least bit convinced that it is a wise expenditure of the taxpayers' money. No doubt some success can be pointed out in cases where financial support has resulted in industrial expansion in underdeveloped parts of the country, but there are other cases where the result has been a higher cost of the products consumed by the Canadian taxpayer. In other cases the claim can be substantiated that the expenditure of public funds has merely resulted in the transfer of unemployment from one part of the country to another without any net gain whatsoever.

It seems to be a penchant of government to introduce programs without having the facility or the will, in some cases, to follow them up with an analysis to see whether the benefits are equal to the costs. I think if I were making a recommendation to the government on an over-all basis, it would be that more of our programs should be subjected to minute scrutiny after they had been in operation for a period of time in order to see whether taxpayers are getting value for their money. In many cases, I suspect they are not. Certainly, the Department of Regional Economic Expansion is one case where I think it would have been better if the department had never been formed. That is not to deny that there are parts of the country in need of economic assistance but there are other ways to accomplish this. It can be done by the application of the rule of law in budgets to provide special tax privileges or accelerated depreciation or some other financial benefits in certain parts of the country if that is desired. There is an objection to the fact that subjective judgments are being made by people with no experience in business. One has only to look at the dossiers of some of the people involved in making these decisions to know that they are quite unqualified. They have never had to raise money and account for it personally and, as a result, funds are disbursed in a way that is casual, to say the least.

In summary, Mr. Speaker, I would say that in relation to this motion we have three principles which deserve more attention and debate than they have received lately. There is the whole question of secrecy. In a case like this why can information not be made public? Why should the Canadian people be denied the information on which judgments are based? Why should those of us who sit in parliament and have a responsibility to the Canadian people in respect of parliamentary and governmental expenditures, not have the information necessary to decide for ourselves whether the government is being prudent with tax dollars?

[Mr. Hellyer.]

We have grown up with the tradition of secrecy in this country, and I have seen some of this from the inside. I remember when it was considered improper in Canada to brief members of parliament on defence information which was classified even with a modest level of security classification. I had a chance to do something about that, and after I became minister I briefed members of the parliamentary committee on defence, including information which was secret and top secret in classification. Based on my own experience, Mr. Speaker, I am convinced that secrecy is often used as a cloak to deny to parliament and the Canadian people the facts to which they are entitled. I should like to see much more information made available, and I am sure it could be prepared in such a way that it would not prejudice the careers or integrity of the people who write the briefs.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, I think that government as a whole is getting involved in far too many judgments in the marketplace. In particular, I think this practice of setting up boards and departments with arbitrary powers should be checked. There are too few checks on the spending of public funds and the whole trend toward intervention on an arbitrary basis is alarming, in my opinion, and should be thoroughly examined. If the results are as I expect, the trend should be reversed.

Finally, and directly related to the program to which I have referred, is the total amount of money collected from the Canadian people. When we are involved in so many cases of subsidization, when we are involved in so many cases of attempting to do the impossible, inevitably we have to collect more money from the Canadian taxpayer than is reasonable. This is becoming a major problem and affects not only low income earners of Canada but all income earners, including the middle class. For the majority of Canadians, except the very rich, the tax level has reached the point of becoming burdensome. I know this from experience, having talked to constituents in my riding. Many of them find it difficult to keep their heads above water financially. The burden of taxation is becoming very great at the municipal level, and at the provincial level. In Ontario, after the last election, a number of taxes and levies have been substantially increased. The burden is heavy at the federal level. At the end of the year, personal income taxes are to rise in accordance with the provisions of the recent budget. So, too much money is being collected for questionable projects. Too much money is being spent on so-called priorities that are not the real priorities of the average Canadian citizen. The government is becoming involved in too many areas which, in my opinion, would be better left to the responsibility of the average taxpaying citizen himself.

• (1720)

**Mr. B. Keith Penner (Thunder Bay):** Mr. Speaker, I listened with some care to the remarks of the hon. member for Trinity (Mr. Hellyer). I noted at the outset that he charged that the government, in assuming responsibility for the reconstruction and operation of the heavy water plant at Glace Bay, Nova Scotia, had blundered. I waited with some anticipation to hear the facts which would support that charge.