

Government Spending

When the Prime Minister talks about the revolution of rising expectations he should, with equal candour, be prepared to talk about the revolution of diminishing credibility which his party and his administration have brought about in relation to parliament, to government and to the process of politics generally. The reversals, U-turns and flip-flops which have been exhibited to Canadians by the present government are beyond redemption through the art of alibi. This is what the Minister of Finance (Mr. Macdonald) said in his Rosedale victory celebration on July 8, 1974:

● (1530)

Leadership was the issue in this election... Inflation was a great concern but this was not a vote for or against inflation. Everybody's against inflation. It was a vote against direct controls. The voters rejected wage controls and the notion that government spending was responsible for inflation at this time, which I have to regard as a sensible judgement.

I suppose the Minister of Finance believed in what he said at that time. I don't know what he believes in today. Along with the Prime Minister and the other ministers of the government, he is trying to tell us that times have changed: yesterday's white is today's black; yesterday's thorn is today a rose. They spent years of their careers in the cabinet accusing my party and myself of being prophets of doom and gloom. Madam Speaker, it is now clear that we were not false prophets. The false prophets were those with positions of leadership within the government and within the Liberal party.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Stanfield: They should have known better and they should have behaved better. But they chose the primrose path. They chose expediency over responsibility. They chose excess instead of sufficiency as a hallmark of their trappings of office. I get the feeling that many of them are numbed, now, by the realization of where this has led the country and the mood of the country. But shock by itself is not repentance, and retrenchment is not restraint. They talk about changing attitudes in the country. Let them confess who made a major contribution to breeding those attitudes they now want to change. Sackcloth has no credibility in its own right; and it certainly has no meaning at all when it cloaks a creature with a forked tongue.

Let somebody in the government have the courage to say that its laissez-faire approach to spending money on frills and peacockery was a mistake. Office renovations alone have put the government in a position where the public knows that many ministers and officials are going to tough out this war on inflation in pretty sumptuous bunkers.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Stanfield: Those who are on the firing line, those who are urged to accept restraints which are not very pleasant to bear, are not going to be impressed by chocolate soldiers. Everywhere a Canadian looks, he sees things like the lavish reception at Mirabel. There are those on the other side who will say these things do not really mean very much, that they represent only a very small fraction of total government expenditure. Mr. Speaker, it is exactly that kind of thinking which is ruining the government's credibility and makes it appear unworthy of trust. Unhap-

[Mr. Stanfield.]

pily, it is the kind of thinking which appears to prevail among members of the government today.

In closing, I say there are great areas of government expenditure which need looking into. I mention the unemployment insurance fund particularly, where costs are now running at \$200 per capita instead of \$20 per capita as they were supposed to be. In many respects, the signs of lavishness are perhaps more important, in terms of the public acceptance of restraint, than reasonable expenditures on larger programs. With so many examples of government spending on luxuries rather than on good, plain fare, how can hon. gentlemen opposite seriously expect the public to accept restraint? How can the government seriously expect the public to take it seriously?

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Jean Chrétien (President of the Treasury Board): Madam Speaker, it is Thursday today, yet as I listened to that demonical sermon by the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Stanfield) I had the feeling it must be Sunday. It is difficult for me to get up and defend the government—

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Chrétien: —at this point because yesterday, when I was replying to a question, the same man who was talking about the virtue of not spending shouted across the floor to me, calling me Scrooge because I was not spending enough.

Mr. Stanfield: No.

Mr. Chrétien: When I hear these sanctimonious sermons in the House I am simply amazed. The other day we sat here minute after minute waiting to hear their proposals for reducing expenditure. All we heard was a lot of hot air. The hon. gentleman mentioned the reception at Mirabel. Let me remind him that we are dealing with a budget of \$34 billion. Perhaps we did spend a little too much on the opening of Mirabel.

What else has been referred to? The only other matter concerned unemployment insurance. Well, there was a debate on this very subject in the House yesterday. At the end of that debate the bill will be sent to committee for full examination. Yet the opposition is still asking for an inquiry. Madam Speaker, if members of the opposition have an accusation to make, let them get up in the House and make it. Let them go before the committee and show where money is being wasted on the government's unemployment insurance program. It is useless simply to make general statements of the kind they are making.

The other day in the House the hon. member for Joliette (Mr. La Salle) asked me to put more money into the LIP program. A little later he made the same request of the Minister of Manpower and Immigration (Mr. Andras). Within half an hour the hon. member for Athabasca (Mr. Yewchuk) got up and said we should cut the LIP program. I suggest hon. members opposite should get together in caucus before making statements like that in the House. Today they are asking us to reduce expenditures. Look at *Hansard*. The hon. member for Vegreville (Mr. Mazankowski) was on his feet on October 21 asking the government to spend more money on the cow-calf operation.