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CANADA

House of Commons Debates  
OFFICIAL REPORT

SPEECH

OF

RIGHT HON. ARTHUR MEIGHEN

LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION

ON

THE BUDGET

DELIVERED IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS ON MAY 14 AND 15, 1924

Right Hon. ARTHUR MEIGHEN (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, I feel that I can compliment the hon. member who has just taken his seat (Mr. Hoey) on his rapid advance in parliamentary life and standing, and as respects his speech to-day, at least on its style, its splendidly constructed sentences and, as well, the temperament which characterized its delivery. Needless to say, I could not agree with very much of his argument. In many cases I could not discern the argument; but none the less, I have not given up hope that, with a more extended experience in public affairs, and a more practical knowledge of Canadian conditions and business, he may yet become a valuable acquisition to public life.

I want to make some comment at once on that feature of the budget presentation this year which has to do with our finance, with our debt and with the effect of the year's business upon both. The Acting Minister of Finance (Mr. Robb) came to parliament and assured us that we were in the glorious position this year of having a surplus over all outlay, a surplus applicable to the national debt; that the Canadian people now are in debt some \$30,000,000 less than they were a year ago. Some of us were prepared for this. We heard a sound go forth earlier in the year that we were going to have a balanced budget. We were not advised how this was to be accomplished, but it was to be done by some means or another. I was not able myself to divine what could be the scheme. I had followed the monthly presentations of expenditure and revenue, and I could not see that we were gaining in either direction.

I remembered that in 1923 the Minister of Finance (Mr. Fielding) closed the year with an addition to the debt of \$31,641,067.01. I have a little arithmetic in my composition, and I was able to reason that if this year there was even a balancing, it would mean that we must have improved our finances, the advantage of revenue over expenditure, by just that amount. Having looked into the actual returns and obtained them up to date, I want to lay before the House just what improvement we did make. All agree there should have been some improvement; we all know that as we recede from the war, war expenditure naturally diminishes. Civil re-establishment was reduced a year ago by about \$3,000,000, and it was expected that it would show reduction this year by about the same amount. But an analysis shows that the aggregate improvement is so small relatively as to be almost negligible. The revenue for the year was better than the revenue of the year before by \$1,782,642.34. Imagine an increase of only one and three-quarter million dollars after an elevation of the sales tax, after the addition of all the other taxes that hon. gentlemen opposite imposed. We actually gathered in \$1,782,642.34 more than the year before. These figures are from the returns of the Department of Finance issued the 30th April, inclusive of all revenue received prior to that date and applicable to the previous fiscal year, inclusive of all expenditure of which account had been received, applicable also to the previous fiscal year which ended the 31st

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