

The Budget—Mr. Jamieson

Mr. Jamieson: Coming back to the question of choice, Mr. Speaker, I made the point that many things are desirable and at the same time mutually exclusive. There is something else that we have learned in this country, as have many other countries in the post war world, and that is the importance of taking a variety of desirable options and granting them some degree of priority, because at any given moment in time it is not possible for our system to implement all of them and retain its equilibrium. If we are guilty of anything in this House since the war perhaps it is that we have too frequently ignored that fact.

As long as the economy was moving at a steady increase—as it was for a great many years—and as long as the world situation was reasonably stable we could go on enjoying the luxury of improving our standard of living and the way of life of the majority of Canadians. The problem with that system—and we are not the only country to discover this—is that when a system has built into it a continuously escalating annual cost and when there is any impact of a negative nature on the economy, something has to give. We either have to slow down and decide we are not going to implement certain new programs in this country—and this applies to provincial as well as federal governments—or certain programs in place must in some way be accommodated so that we do not go overboard on expenditures. It seems to me very important to recognize this.

If we assume that simply because parliament or the Government of Canada—or for that matter any other government—has started on a particular course of action, that it is going to continue to escalate indefinitely and without ceiling, then, of course, in future there will be an escalation. This put grave and significant restraints on what the Minister of Finance and the Government of Canada was able to do in the present circumstances, namely the fact that over 70 per cent of the total expenditures of the government are of a nature that do not lend themselves readily or easily, if at all, to any kind of significant change or adjustment. These are statutory programs in the health and welfare field, and include a whole range of programs relating to provincial payments.

● (1740)

Mr. Stevens: Nonsense!

Mr. Jamieson: I hear the hon. member making a comment that this is nonsense. I think the truth of my assertions can easily be demonstrated, and perhaps we will have the opportunity during the course of this debate to do so.

Let me mention a few of the programs of which I have been speaking. Let us look at what has been happening in terms of provincial equalization payments. They have gone up steadily over the years. There is no cap on them. There is no way in which they can be capped. I could refer to many, many more programs.

Whether my figure of 70 per cent is precisely correct or not, the fact remains that the bigger portion of the revenues of the Government of Canada are committed in a manner which literally prevents their being changed unless there are changes in legislation and federal-provincial negotiations.

[Mr. Jamieson.]

I return to the remaining 25 per cent or 30 per cent of the budget which can be cut. Remember, we are now dealing with a relatively small percentage of the total budget. The hon. member for York-Simcoe (Mr. Stevens) says, "I could cut the figure." But he does not say where—which is what I said a moment ago. He simply says that the government could cut significant amounts from its spending. I ask, what would he cut? He has already said that he would not touch health or medicare costs. And that is one big package. Does he suggest that he would be prepared to cut some of the various programs which are designed to help the provinces, programs to which I referred?

Mr. Stevens: Try cutting consulting fees.

Mr. Jamieson: I am glad the hon. gentleman brought this subject up. I would gladly have spent a little more to provide him with a couple of consultants, because he might have been more competent this afternoon than he was. I have talked about playing politics with inflation, and the hon. member has precisely demonstrated my point.

I should like to refer to a saying I heard a long time ago which will be familiar, no doubt, to hon. members opposite, including the hon. member for Oshawa-Whitby. The comment surely applies to the present situation. The saying is this: the essence of tyranny is the denial of complexity. And if anybody was ever guilty of practising that kind of tyranny, it is the Tory and NDP spokesmen who took part in this debate. I repeat: the essence of tyranny is the denial of complexity.

When the hon. member for York-Simcoe talks about cutting expenditures by hundreds of millions of dollars, he talks about those things which are well known and highly publicized, like consultants' fees.

Mr. Stevens: What about Petro-Can?

Mr. Jamieson: The hon. member says, what about Petro-Can? That is a beautiful question. The hon. member spent the first ten minutes of his speech denouncing the Minister of Finance for fooling the House—I think he used some such expression—by saying there was no money in Petro-Can and that therefore he could not cut any money out. Of course there is good reason why there is no money in the company. The hon. member would have been equally indignant if we had included money for the company in the estimates before introducing the appropriate bill in this House. The hon. member is fully aware that his party would not have supported such a procedure. So, let me answer the question the hon. member asked out of one side of his mouth: you cannot cut the money for Petro-Can, because there is no money in it. But when it comes to savings, when it comes to obtaining money for all the hon. member's fancy ideas, what does he say? He proposes to take \$1.5 billion out of Petro-Can. I say to my hon. friend, there is a heck of a big hole in the bottom of the can he is talking about.

We are not talking here about what is to happen in the next four or five years in terms of government expenditures. We are talking about the current fiscal year. The hon. member must know, on the one hand, that there is no money in the Petro-Can budget, but then he says that he is