

Employment Tax Credit Act

debate a budget in the normal course of our affairs and, above all, that he should have failed to produce a budget which, hopefully, might do something meaningful to correct the present economic situation.

The month of April has almost run out. If I were to make any comment to my constituents or to the Canadian public generally it would relate to the unbelievable air of unreality which seems to permeate this House, in particular the government side. Mr. Speaker, I know this has concerned you in other Parliaments in other times, but what I find so hard to reconcile in my mind is that we as a nation, a great nation, great in tradition, in resources, in agricultural potential, in manufacturing, led by a government which is responsible to Parliament, should be so oblivious, apparently, to the crisis which is coming.

● (1720)

I find it shocking that the government of the day is showing such indifference. I say this because there is absolutely no doubt where our present policies are leading this nation—to disaster. There is no alternative. If we are lucky enough that it does not strike in 1980, I can guarantee, as any knowledgeable economist in this country will guarantee, that the disaster of which I speak will strike, if not in 1981 or 1982, certainly by 1984. However, if we are to avert the disaster I refer to and if we are going to try at least to lessen its impact, it is time that the government of the day became realistic and started to make some of the hard decisions which have to be made in order to bring back responsible fiscal and monetary management to Canada.

I have felt that in the December 11 budget brought in by my colleague and deskmate, the then minister of finance, at least a start had been made, but only a start. At least, for example, we had identified a course which, if followed, would have narrowed the deficit in this country by approximately half of what it otherwise would have been if trends had been left to follow their own course.

Not only had we taken those steps, but we also had the courage to show the Canadian public, for the first time, where the fiscal course in Canada was headed, not just for the immediate, one year perspective, but for five years down the road. Hon. members can imagine my great concern to have spent April in this House and not to have had one tittle of evidence offered from the government benches as to how they see our economy evolving in the 1980-81 down to 1984 scenario. Instead, what we have had furnished to us is a so-called economic statement carefully tucked into a throne speech debate so that it itself could not be debated, and it indicated, for example, that the deficit since December, when the budget of my colleague was introduced, is now anticipated to be \$3.7 billion greater. The budgetary deficit is running at over \$14 billion, and there was only the most casual comment that somehow or other they hope expenditures and financial requirements might be narrowed by \$1 billion between now and the time that a budget is finally introduced.

Hon. members can understand my concern. I think the Canadian public deserves better. For example, there must not be another Parliament, certainly in the British Commonwealth, that is faced with a situation where the last completely debated and passed budget was April 1978, two years ago. That was when we last had a proper accounting and a fully debated budget in this House.

When I say that, hon. members can imagine why I rise to speak now on Bill C-19, to amend the Employment Tax Credit Act. Surely if I wanted anything to highlight how totally out of context the House has become, it is simply to emphasize that here today we are debating, at the government's request, a two-clause bill dealing with an employment tax credit matter which, as we know, was introduced by the previous government, certainly at least partially in the form we have it, and yet we are left without a proper budgetary presentation for us to deal with.

Let me put it this way. When we are told that our deficit is now over \$14 billion, over \$3 billion higher than we anticipated last December, that in turn means that the government in effect is admitting that, on a spending program of \$60 billion, it cannot pay for \$14 billion of what it intends to spend. As hon. members can see, what that really means is that over 25 per cent of the government's revenue is being, so to speak, overspent in the form of expenditures that the government does not expect it can cover.

Think of it; here we have a government which says, in effect, that the revenue it anticipates will be something under \$46 billion. Its expenditures will be over \$60 billion, leaving a shortfall of \$14 billion. It does not take much arithmetic to figure out that that is nearly a 30 per cent overrun on the revenue coming into Ottawa.

The reason I mention this is that we grappled with these figures. If those in the House care to do so, they can pull out a release that we put out through the Treasury Board on January 22. In vivid terms that release showed where the course of the economy would take us if the Crosbie budget was not passed, and that is exactly what we now have before us. I invite you, Mr. Speaker, and other hon. members to take a look at that release because it can be seen year by year how big the deficit will be, how high expenditure levels will be and how big the net debt will become without provisions such as those the hon. member for St. John's West (Mr. Crosbie) proposed on December 11.

What I find so alarming is that on April 30 we are here debating Bill C-19, yet we still have no budgetary presentation to give us the hope that somehow the scenario we brought out on January 22 will not be reality.

I would be less than candid if I did not tell the House that one of my greatest anxieties is to witness what is now happening in the office of the Minister of Finance and in the office of the President of the Treasury Board (Mr. Johnston). There is absolutely no doubt that we have a Minister of Finance who is entirely in the hands of his bureaucracy. He is not running his department. He is being told by the Michael Pitfields and the