

Income Tax Act

I must say that when I read the newspaper report I too was concerned, for I feared that exactly the kind of misinterpretation that was placed upon my remarks in this House yesterday might be the one that would normally spring from such a report. I was particularly perturbed when I found the hon. member for Fundy-Royal (Mr. Fairweather), a man for whom I have enormous respect, had misinterpreted the remarks I believe I made in Thunder Bay. Had I given cause, in what I had said, for these misconstructions of my thought? As a result of my concern I checked with the organizers of the conference, who assured me that there was indeed much distortion of what I actually said. I do not have a written text of my remarks, but there is a tape which the organizing committee has. I have been told that the remark on tax reform attributed to me was not made. If by some slip of the tongue I did make the remark quoted, then I will certainly correct it in the House.

May I call it six o'clock, Mr. Speaker?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Laniel): Order, please. It being six o'clock, I do now leave the chair until eight o'clock p.m.

At six o'clock the House took recess.

AFTER RECESS

The House resumed at 8 p.m.

Mr. Roberts: Mr. Speaker, when the debate was adjourned for the dinner recess I had been saying that to the best of my recollection the remark that had been attributed to me was not one that I had made. I made every effort to find out from the organizers of the conference whether I had made such a remark and they assured me that there was great distortion in the report. I regret that, because at the conference this past weekend I made a speech which I thought was extremely interesting.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Roberts: And I am dismayed to find that not one of the interesting things I said was reported in the press. I am reassured by knowing that if I had actually launched the vicious attack against the government, as alleged, no doubt other newspapers would have also reported my remarks.

I said this weekend that I thought it was important for us to develop instruments of government, precise instruments for planning, which would enable us to look at government legislation, proposals and programs in light of a coherent economic policy on the basis of how the Canadian economy should look at the end of this decade. I mentioned several areas where I thought this could be done and several elements that might be part of such a policy. I mentioned unemployment policy, productivity policy and resource policy. I mentioned social welfare and its cost. I wanted social costs to be considered and an assessment of them to be a factor in this decision-making process.

I referred hardly at all to tax reform, except to cite it as one example of an instrument which should be used or

which should be a means of reaching these objectives. I referred to the hon. member for Waterloo (Mr. Saltsman), my friend even though he belongs to another political party. I described the two years we had spent on the tax committee. I explained that in the deliberations of the committee it was difficult for us to move as effectively and fast as I would like to move without some overriding conception of what our industrial policy should be. I admitted that these were difficulties for the committee.

In my view, these difficulties were overcome. At the end of two years we arrived at a policy on tax reform which I wholly supported. That was in the Commons committee report. It is because the government's proposed tax reform measure embodies so much of the Commons committee report that I am happy to support the government's measure. I admit—as do, I think, all members on this side of the House—that the tax reform proposals are not absolutely, purely and truly perfect.

An hon. Member: I do not think that.

Mr. Roberts: Most of us think that, with the exception of some of my colleagues on this side of the House.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Roberts: We have a varied group over here, Mr. Speaker, and we harbour a variety of views of all colours, like a bank of 1,000 flowers. Essentially, the important things which have been done in the government's tax proposals are these: first, there has been a shifting in the basic exemption levels, a raising of the exemptions which shifts the burden of taxation away from those with lower incomes. That I support. Half the capital gains are to be included in the tax base. This is a great improvement. There is also, to my mind, a more equitable treatment of resource industries. If hon. members of the House are interested in following in detail my views on these points, they will do well to refer to the deliberations of the committee.

I admit, Mr. Speaker, that the tax proposals of the government are not perfect. However, the Leader of the Opposition elaborated what seems to me to be an extraordinary doctrine, namely, that if legislation is not absolutely and purely perfect it should not be proceeded with. I think that is the sort of argument he tried to make in his speech yesterday. He suggested that after ten years of discussing tax reform, going back to the original Carter commission discussions, and ten years of opportunity to present views, we have not had enough time. This is a little like that famous historian, Lord Acton, who was so greatly concerned about researching his book that he compiled material which became so voluminous that he could not get around to writing the book.

The Leader of the Opposition seems to say that if we have not gone into everything in every way, if we do not know everything about everything, then we cannot legislate. He calls that research; it is, more properly, delay, hesitation and indecision. He suggested that legislation must be absolutely perfect before it is passed by this House. I ask, is that a sensible principle to follow? Is that a criterion that we could apply, for instance, even in private life? Suppose Henry Ford has said, "I have a great idea for a production line to produce cars but I have not