

Financial Administration

rate it has accumulated for the first six months the minister will have guessed wrong by forty times. We are simply told that this after all is good business, that the government will be paying off the public debt. I think that on most occasions it would be agreed that it is a sound thing to pay off debts. What should be remembered by members of parliament, however, is that it is not for the minister to decide whether he will pay off public debts. It is for parliament to decide. If it is the intention of the minister to pay off public debts he should state that to parliament, and parliament, I would imagine, would support him as long as it could be demonstrated that the payment was on a reasonable basis.

If the taxation to be imposed upon the taxpayers of Canada is to include an amount for payment on account of the public debt over and above anything that is actually indicated in the estimates themselves, then the Minister of Finance (Mr. Abbott) is taking it upon himself to do something that he thinks is good but which he has not disclosed to parliament. That is not responsible government. That does not accept the authority of parliament over money, and that is the highest responsibility parliament has. There may be a question as to how much of the public debt should be paid off at any time. There are those who contend, and apparently with some sound arguments to support their contention, that, if too large payments are made at a time like this on account of the public debt, instead of being deflationary it may be highly inflationary. Undoubtedly there would be some point at which that would be true. Surely it would be the responsibility of parliament to be in a position to express some opinion on that subject, if it is the intention of the Minister of Finance to go far beyond anything indicated in the budget he has presented. Here we have a situation where the Minister of Finance has been so grossly and outrageously in error—I say “outrageously” having regard to his responsibility to parliament. He estimated a total surplus of \$30 million for the whole year and there is already a surplus in excess of \$600 million for six months, more than forty times the amount that had been estimated on a proportionate basis for the whole year.

Let us see what that means. This is not like a surplus in an ordinary business, because every cent of it is overtaxation. It is an amount of money taken out of the taxpayers' pockets which the Minister of Finance was not authorized to take out of their pockets. It is extremely difficult for any individual taxpayer to measure what \$600 million means in terms of his own daily experience. But let us see what it does mean.

Accepting fourteen million as the population of Canada at this time, it means that for six months every taxpayer in Canada has been overtaxed to the extent of about \$43. Over and above those taxes which the Minister of Finance said he was going to impose, the average taxpayer, every man, woman and child in Canada, is paying \$43. I am hardly correct when I use the word “taxpayer”, because a child is not a taxpayer, and there are a great many people who pay taxes to a limited extent. Nevertheless, everything which is eaten, everything which is worn, everything which is used includes taxes of some kind, and no Canadian should be under the impression that he is escaping these taxes simply because he does not see a tax marked on the things he buys, or because he may not be called upon to pay income or other direct taxes of that kind.

The way that this can best be appreciated is to take a family of five, which is still the normal family in this country. It means that for the first six months of this year, over and above the taxes disclosed in the budget, the head of a family of five has been overtaxed to the extent of \$215. This is not just the amount that has been paid by those in the brackets who pay income tax; it is not just paid by those who pay the visible tax, but that is the average overtaxation for the head of a family of five in this country. I recognize that it may be extremely difficult to introduce into this act a section which will prevent a surplus exceeding in some substantial measure the estimated surplus. This is particularly true when there is a progressive inflation such as we have at this time. Nevertheless, even if the act only had a section declaring that the minister accurately interpret the figures which have been placed before him, there should be something declaring beyond any doubt that it is the duty of the Minister of Finance to present to this house the most accurate estimates possible. I believe if that were there we might not see such grossly inaccurate estimates as we have had this year.

There is one other point I wish to mention concerning the bill now before us, and that is the part which deals with crown corporations. This section, which is a new section of the act, defines crown corporations and also sets forth that it is possible for the Auditor General to be the auditor of crown corporations. Section 76 (c), which is one of the defining sections, gives this interesting definition:

“Crown corporation” means a corporation that is ultimately accountable, through a minister, to parliament for the conduct of its affairs, and includes the corporations named in schedule B, schedule C and schedule D.