

Income Tax

Mr. Jake Epp (Provencher): Mr. Speaker, I welcome the opportunity to speak on Bill C-49 and to express some of my thoughts concerning government expenditure in general as well as to indicate, toward the conclusion of my speech, the direction I should like to see Canada take. It seems we are faced with massive increase in government expenditure, despite the fact that the Minister of Finance (Mr. Turner) has put forward proposals for a 3 per cent tax cut. The fact remains that the amount of money collected by the government is to be greater, which means, of course, that additional sums will have been paid in taxes by the Canadian wage earner and others.

I think it is time the minister recognized that regardless of the number of people he says he has taken off the tax rolls, and regardless of his statements about tax cuts, he will actually be getting more revenue this year from the same taxpayers. Mr. Speaker, if this is a year of restraint I would hate to see a year in which the government thought restraint was not necessary. In just two years we have had an increase in the budget of 44 per cent. If this represents restraint, I am sure many small businessmen and labour union leaders would like to see that type of restraint imposed upon them as well.

It is my contention that Canadian society has in the last number of years come to expect, as a matter of course, government involvement—by which I mean government financial input—in virtually every field. We have come to regard government as a big brother, the idea being that whenever an appeal is made to government, help will be forthcoming. Too often, unfortunately, governments have got themselves into areas in which they should never have been involved in the first place. Thus, we have created a grant mentality, evidence of which is the degree to which members of parliament on all sides are approached by constituents who have heard that grants are available. I had a phone call today along these lines, "Can you tell me what grants are available, because I want to apply for them?"

An hon. Member: That was Syncrude.

Mr. Epp: That type of mentality strikes me as being rather dangerous. It is part and parcel of our national thinking today and I believe it is very dangerous.

● (1550)

What has happened to personal initiative and incentive? I believe we have arrived at the point where leadership must be shown by this government, by this House and by every elected official in Canada in our approach to restraint on government involvement, and that means government expenditure. As members of parliament, we perhaps have not been as frank with our constituents as we should, particularly those who have asked for grants and government involvement. We are being asked to help as much as we can. We have become involved in this attempt to see whether there is more government money available. This kind of attitude must be changed. The objective of every member here must be restraint in respect of government expenditure. I believe it must be a national priority on the part of members of parliament to cut government waste and to cut government expenditures which are simply counterproductive.

This mentality, created by the social welfare state, has affected every one of us. The idea that the government will help must be counteracted. The social welfare state has been described as a system under which the state determines what you and I need. Once the state in its wisdom has determined what we need, it taxes us in order that it can give us the things it has determined we need in the first place. I am a great believer in the idea that if the state governed less, government would be improved.

I am not opposed to many of the programs presently in effect. I will mention some of them later. There are many people in our society who need protection. It is my concept of government that government should protect those who are least able to protect themselves. If the government would rely on that type of objective, we would not have the huge government expenditure that we have today. It is time to stop this attitude, that as the gross national product increases, government expenditure must increase. I do not believe that premise holds water today.

The government and the elected officials in Canada must embark upon a public education program to teach the people that government expenditure cannot go on ad infinitum, that we must consider the cost to the Canadian economy. We must develop confidence, on the part of citizens, in the government regardless of the party in power, confidence that the government is protecting our interests rather than trying to get as much from us as possible. I submit that this government particularly stands condemned for its mental fixation that you govern better by spending more and more. I have seen very little evidence since coming to Ottawa that this message has got through to the government, that is, that spending increases must be curtailed. We have witnessed the trend of the 1960s and the 1970s, marked by many private groups and lobbyists, of more state involvement. We have seen state involvement in virtually everything, and it cannot continue indefinitely.

Happily, this mentality of the 1960s and 1970s has changed to some extent in the mind of the average Canadian. Unfortunately, that is not true of this government. Many of my constituents have told me they do not want to see more government programs but, rather, cut-backs in existing programs and their tax money used in the best way and to the best advantage and benefit of the Canadian people. Let us not simply carry on in this way, on the basis that more government spending will bring more happiness or a better way or quality of life, because this does not follow.

It is high time this government began to show the way. How successful has this minister been in controlling expenditures? He likes to posture in speeches and statements to various groups that it is time for restraint and that controls on government expenditure must be adopted. We are all aware of the procedure that is followed by government departments when they bring forward their budgetary estimates. These estimates are padded, with the knowledge that when they are submitted and reviewed they will be cut back, resulting in the department receiving the amount of money it required in the first place.

This minister keeps talking about tax cuts and the number of Canadians who have been taken off the tax rolls. I had someone check on the number of people the