

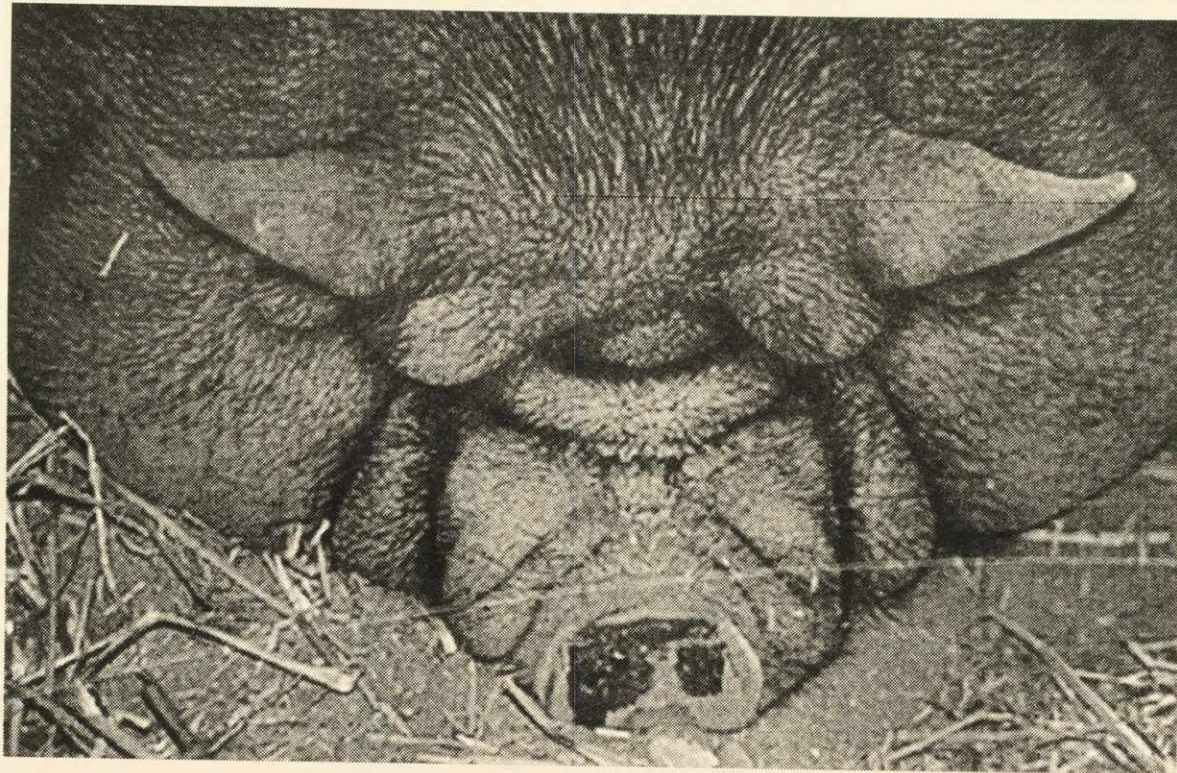
The Tyranny of the Budget Scythe

Paul Martin once vociferated that the overriding concern of his Liberal government was to regain from its debtors "Canada's economic sovereignty." It is this maxim that the Liberal government employs to evaluate each action as it affects federal fiscal policy.

To regain "Canada's economic sovereignty" the Liberals have employed the ever popular budget scythe: no public edifice is left unmolested. True, in order to compete on a global level, and to get our government into a position where it and not bond houses dictate the way in which the federal government spends our tax dollars, the deficit must be reduced. This seems relatively uncontentious, and there is no inherent objection to it. It might even be the case that something good has arisen out of this slashing frenzy: it has helped, at least to a certain extent, to expunge profligate governmental spending, and it has taught us a thing or two about fiscal and monetary policy.

Yet, something still seems inapposite. It seems obvious that since we all seem — in some abstract way — to gain from the elimination of the budget, we all ought to correspondingly bear some burden on the way to meeting this end. Herein lies the contention with the current deficit and debt reduction methodology: it does not represent a just balance of benefits and burdens across the Canadian society. That is, not all citizens are being asked to sacrifice — and it is a sacrifice — as much as others to meet the goal of regaining "Canada's economic sovereignty."

Three examples bear this out.



First, the most recent example of belt-tightening is the elimination of the GST exemption on books, which will take place when three Maritime provinces meld together the GST and the PST. When an objection was raised — as it well should be — Paul Martin merely shrugged it off. Where are we going to get the \$140 million to fight off the deficit if we neglected to tax books, Martin insouciantly asked?

Another fine example of clawbacks is the recent cost-cutting measure at the CBC. The federal government has decided to reduce the CBC's annual operating grant by \$350 million over four years. Yet a third instance of deep budget cutting is the instantiation of the Canadian Health and Social Transfer Act: a bill which has the net effect of

drastically reducing the remittances that are transferred for post-secondary education, health care and social assistance from the federal government to the provincial government. The net loss to the provinces over the next three years is a whopping \$7 billion.

On the flip side of this there is little or no evidence suggesting that the Liberal government is moving toward precluding some wealthy people who get advance tax rulings from transferring billions of dollars outside of Canada so as to avoid paying millions of dollars in taxes. Nor is there any intimation that 'unpaid' or 'deferred' corporate tax is being collected, or that other such tax loopholes are being sewn up. Furthermore, the Liberal's might seriously consider stifling ridiculous

projects like spending millions to provide some Canadians with their very own Canadian flag.

It appears that either those who can least afford to bear out the budget cuts are directly affected by the cuts (e.g. students and the poor), or the budget cuts are a direct attack on cherished, unifying goods held in common by all Canadians (e.g. health care, education and cultural institutions). This an egregious blunder on the part of the Liberal government. It is a pernicious, lamentable state of affairs, and it needs to be corrected immediately: a liberal democracy requires it.

Without a just balance of benefits and burdens we are left with derision and rancour whereby aggrieved groups (baby-busters, baby-boomers, social justice activists, fiscal conservatives and the aged) vie for their share of the pie without regard for those who lose as they gain. This is both grievous and counterproductive for all considered as it pits us against each other and precludes consensus about the nature and direction of our society, a much cherished goal slowly being pushed from the core of politics to the penumbra.

Perhaps it is time the Liberals rethought their current deficit reduction methodology. Without jettisoning this current methodology, the yawning gap between Canadians can only widen, making it harder to bring people together in the battle to bring Canada into prosperity and out of the doldrums. Let's hope that the Liberals can do this before it is too late. Let's hope that it is already not too late.

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ANTHONY SKELTON

letters

A critique of a critique

The Gazette's review of *Jude* (September 26) left me wondering if the reviewer and I saw the same film.

His notion that "the film's atmosphere rarely reflects the mood of its characters" is entirely preposterous. The director, Michael Winterbottom, makes clever use of black and white to set a bleak tone at the outset of the tragedy. His use of bright lighting (which becomes dim as things become increasingly tragic for the protagonist) is deftly done, perhaps a little too subtly for the reviewer.

The reviewer criticises *Jude* for its lack of "lush" costumes and scenery but he says they are authentic. This is a contradictory statement if ever I heard one. He further bemoans the fact that the score's lack of emotion left him reliant on "events in the movie" for emotional stimulation. Surely this intrepid reviewer didn't expect to find stimulation at the bottom of his bag of popcorn.

If this isn't bad enough, the reviewer details how *Jude* is based on one of Thomas Hardy's darkest novels. He then claims that there just isn't enough laughter. This is like saying that *Hamlet* is tragic, but the audience could use some jokes.

The reviewer says *Jude* dreams of an education at "Christchurch," which is a glaring error. Anyone who has either seen the film or read the novel can testify that the town in question is called *Christminster*.

While everyone is entitled to his or her respective opinion, the inconsistencies, ambiguities, and errors in the article left me wondering if the reviewer knows his *mise-en-scène* from his elbow.

Nik Madan

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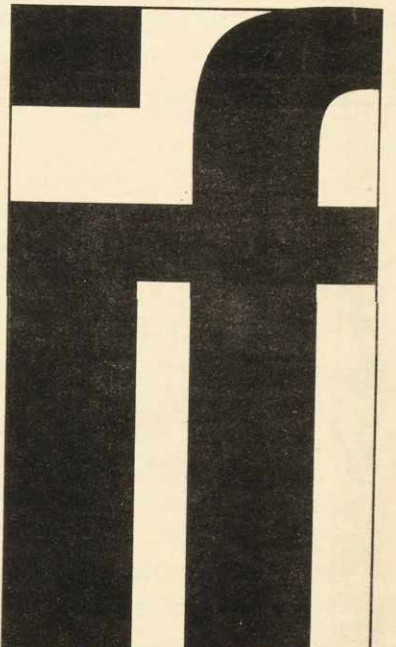
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