

Financial Administration

this. He has pointed out all the responsibility that the government carry. The only answer I can make to that is that with honour and privilege, responsibility always goes. After all, the government like to feel that they enjoy a great deal of honour; and I am sure that they regard it as a privilege—and a very proper one—to be charged with this responsibility that is theirs. Being a generous person, I would remind the parliamentary assistant that I have told them before how this job can be done, and the only way it can be done. The way to do it is not to ask the department to come in and then to say: We should like you to reduce your estimates. The way to do it is to make up your mind how much you can allow them to spend, and tell them accordingly. You would probably have to have a bodyguard if you did that. I know it would be a terribly difficult thing to do, but I am satisfied that it is the only way in which you will ever cut to the bone.

The Chairman: Shall the clause carry?

Mr. Drew: No, Mr. Chairman. I think the point that has been raised by the hon. member for Greenwood is one that should not be passed over too lightly, because this perhaps will be the last time that there will be an opportunity to discuss the matter in relation to the responsibility of this particular department. At the time this measure was under consideration before, suggestions were made that there might be some way of establishing the responsibility of the minister and of the department for presenting to the house an estimate which would be as accurate as possible, within the measurable errors that inevitably creep into broad estimates of this kind. At this stage it seems difficult for any representative of the government to say that we have suddenly been confronted with unexpected revenues which have given us a large surplus; because this government has, year after year, been producing these large surpluses which, in fact, are nothing but overtaxation—and extremely heavy overtaxation—at a time that the people are already greatly worried about the high cost of living.

The Minister of Finance was away at the time the discussion took place on the introduction of this bill into the house. When he came back from Europe he made a statement here which at no point suggested any concern on his part about the fact that, in the first six months of this year, every man, woman and child in Canada had been overtaxed—not just taxed but overtaxed—by \$43 per head or, as I pointed out at that time, an average of \$215 overtaxation for every family of five in this country, taking that still as an average unit. There was no suggestion by the minister that there should be any

[Mr. Macdonnell (Greenwood).]

reason for concern about that overtaxation. On the contrary, he returned to the argument he had made from time to time that we should be pleased with the opportunity that such surpluses afford to make reductions in the debt of the country, by paying off certain of those obligations out of that surplus.

Mr. Chairman, some of these questions of principle may not have an immense appeal, but it is these questions of principle in relation to matters of that kind that determine whether or not our form of government is going to continue to have the vitality and the strength which it should have in these difficult years.

The point which, it seems to me, has not yet sufficiently impressed itself upon the government is that it is not the government's right to say: We fooled you by including an estimate which would do something good, but which we did not disclose to you at the time. That is like saying to a child to whom you have denied something: Well, my child, I am very sorry that it was necessary for me to deny you this knowledge at the time, but I always had the thought in my mind that I was going to be generous to you at some later date. That may, perhaps, be good child psychology; but we are dealing with the question of the responsibility of parliament and of the right of parliament to determine what money will be voted to the government itself for the business of Canada. The government has no right to place before the house estimates which contemplate the possibility of raising one cent of taxes beyond what they really anticipate and what they disclose to the house.

I have no doubt that the members of the house will support the government in sound business measures as long as those measures are discussed and as long as reasons for supporting those measures are put forward in clear and understandable terms. Nevertheless, it is a challenge to the authority of parliament at any time to say to parliament: We thought this would be a good idea. We did not mention it at the time we got the money, but we claim great credit for having overtaxed the people to a point that made it possible to do something good which you yourself never knew was going to be done. That is, in effect, exactly what we are told when it is said: There is a huge surplus. We did not disclose it. Perhaps we did not expect it, but we claim great credit for paying off the public debt.

By all means, let us do what is wise, sound and to the advantage of this country from the point of view of its economic strength and stability. But in the consideration of this section we come to a real question as to