

HEAVY TAXES AT RECESSION DAWN

Liberal budget now would be burden on public

An analysis
by DON MCGILLIVRAY
Southam News

OTTAWA — The opposition parties in Parliament keep telling Finance Minister Allan J. MacEachen to hurry his budget.

Let's hope their prayers go unanswered. A budget brought in now by MacEachen, bearing in mind the mood of the government, would likely be a disaster. It would burden the economy with new taxes, just as a recession begins, in a vain attempt to reduce the budget deficit.

The best hope for the Canadian economy right now is that the government will get tripped up on its own constitu-

tional shoelaces this summer and find it impossible to produce a new budget until next fall or winter.

The longer the budget is delayed, the better. A delay will give the recession time to make itself felt and thus make it harder for the government to raise tax rates. And it will postpone the impact of any tax increases that are imposed.

The chances of a later budget are improved by the complicated timetable the government has set for its constitutional talks. Alberta wants progress on an oil pricing agreement as an indication of federal good faith in the constitutional revision. But the federal government doesn't want the momentum toward renewed federalism slowed by the oil question.

The budget has to wait for this situation to sort itself out.

MacEachen's parliamentary secretary, John Evans, put it this way in the Commons on Monday: "You cannot bring down a budget involving revenues and expenditures when one of the major revenue sources and revenue drains facing this government, the energy pricing issue, has not been resolved.

He added that the various ministers had to work out expenditure plans within the spending "envelopes" assigned to them. When this was done, and an energy pricing package "negotiated with the provinces and agreed to... we will be able to bring down a budget."

One limiting factor might be the jeers of the Liberals

last year when the John Crosbie budget was not brought down until the Clark government had been in power six months.

But politicians who seem to have forgotten completely why they criticized and voted to defeat the Crosbie budget may also find it convenient to forget their remarks about its timing.

The conversion of the Trudeau Liberals into fiscal conservatives, worrying more about the budget deficit than the unemployment rate or the recession in the real growth of the economy would be more astonishing if we had not seen the same thing happen last year to the Clark government.

Pusher stations isolated

ROGERS, B.C. (CP) — The romance may have gone out of railroading but high in the Rocky Mountains of British Columbia there's a small group of men, who are the last of a breed.

CP Rail bases six engineers, six maintenance men and nine locomotives at Rogers, about 100 kilometres east of Revelstoke, B.C., to push heavily-laden westbound freight trains up 16 kilometres of steep grade to the Rogers Pass.

It's called a pusher station and those who man it live, literally, in the middle of nowhere.

The station is a collection of mobile homes along a siding by the CP Rail main line where the engineers spend up to three weeks each month away from their families. The scenery is spectacular, especially in summer and fall but the rest of the time is spent fighting the boredom and isolation.

Engineer Mel Koski, 53, makes his home in Revelstoke and has been manning a pusher station off and on during his 37 years on the railway.

The portly, white-haired train driver says he's adapted to the long periods shut in at the camp where the only other human contact comes when rail crews bring in food or a train needs a push. The union contract allows engineers to drive only about 6,100 kilometres each month, which is often piled up quickly.

"You work night and day out here and then you end up with a week and a half off for miles," says Koski.

Trains come into the mountains with three or more engines at the front, or head end, and more in the middle operated by remote control by the engineer at the head end. Track upgrading has eliminated other pusher stations on the line, but the track incline through the pass is still too much for the locomotives so the pushers latch on near the back to give them a boost.

The station has its 3,000-horsepower locomotives linked into five-and four-engine units.

The larger set is used on heavy trains carrying grain, coal and potash to the port of Vancouver while the smaller unit is used for mixed freights. A 10,000-tonne freight can have 12 engines putting out 36,000 horsepower as it climbs the grade.

But even the long hours give way to some spare time and boredom sets in. Koski says snowless months are taken up by hunting and fishing but the winters are long in the Rockies.

"Some of the boys have got a snowmobile but other than that you're quite isolated. It's like being in purgatory or jail."

"We've been after the company to get some recreation out here but they're pretty hard to bend. We haven't got very much. We play cards and such."

Television at Rogers, far from the nearest TV repeater station is out of the question. Koski says the station has some radio reception but even that is limited.

"We work round the clock all the time, so we make three days in one sometimes, two days in one most of the time. You haven't got much else to do but sleep between shifts."

Still, pusher stations seem to attract a hardy breed. Koski says he can't remember anyone ever going stir crazy.

Koski, who has been in pushers since the days of steam, says sometimes not even the pushers can get trains over the hump.

"That's happened quite often, especially in steam-engine days, because they tended to slip a little more, especially on a bad rail."

"But we have an awful problem going up the hill here, quite often with them breaking in two on us. They might slip a little bit and jerk, and with the tonnage and the tremendous horsepower we've got it's quite easy to tear a train in two."

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