Need of Federal Budget in Wartime

Secretary of the Treasury Should Be Real Premier of Finance, Says Chairman of House Committee on Appropriations—Few Changes Necessary to Start New System

T is there need now, as in the days of peace, for a reform budget system? The National United States Government Representative Swager Sherley of Kentucky says yes. He is the recently chosen Chairman of the Committee on Appropriations, one of the big finance expenditure committees of the House. The budget advocate during the greater part of the sixteen years he has been a member of Congress, but a couple of years, "I am not blind to the fact," he said the other day in the course of an interview, "there is a need for a thorough and thorough reform of the way that the federal government builds accounts."

Under normal conditions we should consider every expenditure with reference to whether it is worth the burden it puts upon the people. In time of war there is only one side to that vital question. In time of war, we, as the representatives of the people, must spend to the last of all that the people have, if necessary, to save the people.

But, granting all that, there is as much need now as there ever was for a reform in our system of appropriations as for the money of the people for expenditure by the executive officers of the Government. We are now in full war reform because of the very magnitude of the war finances. And the principles of the house are the same as well as the allotment of the huge sums of today as they do to the smaller sums of the normal period.

Furthermore, we might have such reform and such installation of the budget system as the one now established by the will of the President, supplemented by the creation of a new committee of the House and such machinery as is a reform that will not be undone by the collapse of the war.

Representative Sherley of Kentucky, as the head of the House Appropriations Committee, has been a member of the House for many years. It is not a new duty, but one that is looking at the problem from the point of view of some other chairman of the House that is different from that of the Appropriations Committee.

That is not a new duty and is one that should have the budget system as a whole.

If we look at the budget system as a whole from the inside we learn that we need a system that is different from that of the House that is different from the Senate. We need a system that is designed to avoid the abuses of any kind.

"It is necessary to have a budget system as an indispensable instrument of the federal government reforms and economies, and for the correlation of the needs of the different executive officials of the Government to guard against skimping in one place and being too lavish in another, to make the budget an instrument of the people's interest and not that of any other interest."

That is the obvious need for the budget system, one that is not so obvious, but one that is not less real—this is the need of the people of America for education in the affluence of the Government, which would do if public interest could be focused every year, first on the great bulk of the aggregate demands of the Executive, and then directed to the policies and principles involved in the satisfactions of which these sums are demanded.

That psychological need of the people on the part of the representatives of the people in Congress. We cannot breed big, broad-gauge statesmen in the House and Senate when we have before us the present picture, the budget, budge, hodge-podge methods of financing the Government and of determining the demands of the Government. Instead of developing statesmen who can see the United States as a whole, we train men to do their work as specialists in this or that, and the other thing, and that they think will benefit their localities and themselves, and they are doing that in a political way with their constituents.

Congress and the people both need what they have never had—a big, comprehensive, and clear annual picture of all the needs of the country, something that will show us every separate problem with reference to its relative importance and bearing to every other problem.

As I have already intimated, this thing can be done by an Appropriations Committee that will begin the reform by sending to Congress a real budget, which has his character and his principles. That means that the Secretary of the Treasury must cease to be a mere messenger boy for the treasury. That means an examining the various departments. That means that all make their estimates with reference to the total amount of all the appropriations, with reference to their relative merits from the point of view of the national welfare and progress, and not merely to the desire to regard the amount to be removed from the total bill. These departmental estimates should be considered by the Cabinet as a whole. The Appropriations Committee should be obliged to show cause to the Cabinet in order to secure that other departments why he wanted so much money. It is necessary that he should have an appropriation for such a purpose which the Committee, when the Appropriations Committee, when the Committee, for the President, and the Committee, for Congress, the President, and the Committee, for Congress to consider. They would form a real budget.

So much for the part the President and the Cabinet play in the establishment of a budget system. What Congress should do is "What Congress should do is to insist on the budget system as a whole, and agreed to and approved by the Appropriations Committee."

This suggestion of mine has been objected to on the ground that the Appropriations Committee would be too large. But it would be no bigger than committees that in other cases. This would be a bit of a change but it would be for the common man and they are in the interest of the common man that is the law of the Constitution. The Congress of the United States is the Congress of the States, and that is the way it should be. The Congress of the United States, States has been so big in that order to find a Congress that has the power and the ability to act those matters, and the organization and activities of its individual members must be controlled and regulated. Such a Congress as we now have is too big. It will develop and train them. It will give us a breed of statesmen from which Presidents should be able to select the right sort of men for their Cabinets."