

Anti-Inflation Act

tries, is affected by inflation of 4 per cent, 5 per cent or 6 per cent. There is no such thing as doing away with inflation unless you bring on a major depression: that is the only way to halt inflation. For years my party has said that we can lessen, if not eliminate, the effects of inflation on those receiving low and fixed incomes and pensions. We can contain the rate of inflation to a much better degree if we introduce programs which are fair to people.

● (1600)

I have heard government spokesmen use the term "an element of rough justice." If it is said to be rough justice for the poor and those on fixed incomes, I suggest it is not rough justice but injustice. To control inflation properly, you must bring in a series of policies. You must introduce over-all plans which deal with several problems at the same time. You must attack inflation, put greater emphasis on combatting unemployment, and meet the social and human needs of the people of this country. You must do this through providing, in a massive way, housing which our people can afford. That will do much to cure both inflation and unemployment at the same time.

We have contended for years that we can ameliorate the rate of inflation if we introduce a system of selective price controls and establish a prices review board which would require those who wish to raise prices to appear before the board and justify the increase. If they can justify the increase by proving an actual cost increase, we would be fair and say, "All right; you are allowed that much increase." If General Motors wants to increase the price of its trucks by \$300 but can prove only increased costs of \$100, then a price increase of \$100 would be allowed. Surely that is fair. Surely that is the more honest way to control the cost of living and inflation. It is better to do this than to take it out on our low income people.

If we were to control the prices of areas of our economy involved with steel, farm machinery, fertilizer, and products of that nature, we would effectively control not only the price of steel and of the other commodities mentioned but we would make sure that steel manufacturers and other manufacturers do not create artificial shortages and then persuade the government to grant increases. You cannot have one without the other, as the song says. If you control price, you must have some say in production. If you control the price of steel, you also control the input costs of a host of other items, such as automobiles, farm machinery, refrigerators, stoves, structural steel—you name it. You would not need to go snooping into the books of every storekeeper and contractor to see what he is charged, because you would know what his steel is costing.

Our proposed prices review board would work exactly the opposite to the way the proposed Anti-Inflation Board will work. If somebody complains to the government board, the board will look into it. We think it should be done the other way. We think that anyone who wants to increase price should first appear before the board to justify the price increase, before the increase is allowed. Do it that way, I say. If the government insists on setting up the Anti-Inflation Board as proposed, then at least I and one other member of parliament will tell the people in our constituencies to send to the board notification of each and every price increase, wherever it may take place.

[Mr. Benjamin.]

That reminds me of something. Has the government considered doing as fast investigation of the wholesale and retail grocery chains and department stores of this country? I was on the telephone to people in Regina and Vancouver and learned something which I suppose is common knowledge. Because this dummy government tipped its hand in advance on the holiday weekend, management in many stores the other day went galloping up and down the aisles, putting up the price of thousands of commodities. I am told they started doing this even before the Prime Minister came on television to announce the program. I think the government should order a thorough investigation to compare the price of thousands of commodities in the week before October 14 with the price of the same commodities immediately after October 14. This would be an interesting exercise. The government ought to do this if it is serious about restraint and wants to be fair.

In addition to imposing selective controls and establishing the prices review board, we should make sure that our tax system is fair. I notice that the Prime Minister talked about taxing away the excess income of those who break the guidelines. Fine—but I will believe it when I see it, because so much of our tax system is unfair. It discriminates between the poor and the rich, between the corporation and the individual, and the entire system needs to be revamped.

If the government does the things I have suggested, if it introduces programs which are fair and equitable, it will gain the support and co-operation of the people of this country. But it must do some of those things I have suggested. It must attack unemployment and provide housing if it wants the co-operation which it needs in order to succeed.

Mr. Lloyd R. Crouse (South Shore): Madam Speaker, it is with some concern that I rise to speak on Bill C-73, the government's announced mandatory guidelines as a cure for inflation. My concern over this bill started with the Prime Minister's presentation on national television on Thanksgiving Day. Although Canadians have much about which to be thankful, the spirit of thanksgiving was not improved by our watching our Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) mouthing policies he has consistently ridiculed and which he obviously does not intend to support by example.

The fact is that the Prime Minister and his colleagues duped the voters in 1974 just to win an election. At that time, all the members of the cabinet hid the economic facts from Canadians, just as they hid them with regard to our oil reserves. But now some of the truth is becoming evident. Having ignited the inferno, the Prime Minister now asks voters to dampen the fires of inflation.

The request of the Prime Minister for personal restraint was almost nauseating, coming as it did from the mouth of a man who has proved to be the most profligate spend-thrift in Canada's history. His personal lifestyle, at public expense, would put an Indian prince to shame. It includes swimming pools, massive staffs, Cadillacs and travel.

An hon. Member: Shame!

Mr. Crouse: I hear an hon. member say "shame." Let him stand and refute what I have said. These are the facts,