

That hon. member then went on to discuss the question of the price gouging in the food industry, which he alleges is taking place. He attempted to substantiate his argument by referring to a shopping list obtained from the hon. member for Nickel Belt, a subject matter in respect of which we have heard comments before. He read into the record certain price increases and then purported to use these as the foundation stone for his argument that severe price gouging is taking place.

The leader of the NDP castigated the government on the fact that the Food Prices Review Board did not have the power to roll back prices, but conveniently ignored the fact that the Food Prices Review Board has on frequent occasions stated that despite the most exhaustive investigations it has found that such gouging or profiteering at the distribution level is not taking place.

The other point the hon. member made reference to was related to agricultural land. He pointed out that this had been an effective argument used by his colleagues during the Ontario election, but he did not point out that one of the reasons why agricultural land is being abandoned by farmers is that they are having a difficult time getting a fair price for their produce and, like a lot of people in this House and elsewhere, they are not prepared to work for a meagre income and are insisting on getting an adequate return for their efforts or they will not stay on the farms. I think in his advocacy along this line he failed to come to grips with the real problems and ignored the realities of the situation. However, the Minister of Finance pointed out the weaknesses in his position.

In refreshing contrast, the Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. Stanfield) when speaking in the debate said he recognized there were gaps and defects in the program. I believe it was he who coined the phrase "rough justice". He did recognize the difficulties in implementing the program. He said he would like to see the time of the program shortened. In other words, he made some constructive critical observations which I think the Minister of Finance and those of us on this side of the House listened to with considerable appreciation. I think it is very true to say that there was a very real contrast between the behaviour of the Leader of the Official Opposition in this serious hour of the country's history, and that of the leader of the NDP.

The Leader of the Opposition recognized that we are in the midst of a crisis and that this country runs the risk of economic ruin. He recognized that, on the best of authority, inflation has reached the point where it must be stopped, and notwithstanding his very real objections to the program he is ready to get behind it, support it in principle, and contribute effective and critical observations.

In contrast to that we have members of the NDP unready at any point to say the program has merit. They say it lacks merit in any area but are unwilling to say that if they had to bring forward a program they would do it this way or do it that way. Instead, they trot out their time worn clichés about monster corporations, and all their phrases about no competition in the market place. Then finally, of course, they pay their traditional dues to the one sector of the community they live off, namely, the powerful labour unions, and point out that they are the ones who are going to suffer.

Anti-Inflation Program

There is one thing we on this side of the House can say; we are not anti-labour. And we are not saying we are anti-management. We are trying to preserve the economic fabric of this country.

● (1520)

The Minister of Finance in introducing this program recognized that it has defects but he is prepared, and has already done so by amendment at the committee stage, to remedy some of these defects. He has listened to members opposite at the committee stage, as he has today. I feel certain that the overwhelming majority of Canadians are ready to take this program, defects and all, and try to make it work.

I think it is a singular disservice to Canada and to parliament that members of the New Democratic Party have chosen to join with the Canadian Labour Congress in respect of the \$500,000 that has been allocated to the cause of trying to destroy this program and bring it to the ground in any way possible. The difficulties Canadians face are certainly unquestioned.

There is the further question which is very much on the minds of many of us concerning whether the government has faced up to its own responsibility in cutting its own costs in dealing with the situation. Many of us have been heartened by the declared intention of the government to reduce its own costs significantly this year. I welcome that decision, as I know do many members throughout the House. The problem of course is that when these intentions are reduced to practical measures there will be many painful realizations that programs cherished by members on both sides of the House may be concluded. There presumably will be many people losing their positions in government, people who believed they were performing very valuable functions. In other words, we will soon hear, when these cuts are inaugurated, cries of outrage from certain people who this morning have urged that cuts take place.

So, what we on this side of the House believe is that unless government plays its part at all levels and cuts its costs, unless the Bank of Canada plays its part in managing the money supply, and unless the community at large realizes for the short term at least that none of us will be winners if the economy is destroyed and we become uncompetitive in the world then the whole system will collapse. If there is that realization then the program will succeed.

I hope that in the committee, and when the bill returns to the House, members of the New Democratic Party will recognize their responsibility and realize what this country expects from them, a party which has contributed much in the past to the concepts that are now part of our social fabric. I hope that they will get behind this program and stop simply offering shallow criticisms, and mouthing the negative response of their labour friends, and get behind this program and make it work so that we will have a better society.

Mr. Andy Hogan (Cape Breton-East Richmond): Mr. Speaker, I do not agree with the need for this legislation. It is evident that rather than being a well thought out contingency plan, that has been held in mothballs since 1971, it is