

Anti-Inflation Act

that the minister would have had a great deal more acceptance of this program from the public. After all, we do not hear too many howls from British Columbia where another opponent of price controls, one of the arch disciples of the NDP, has seized upon full controls to deal with food prices, rents, and some other aspects of inflation, although not all of them.

I will not talk about fiscal and monetary policy, and I will not talk about the control of government expenditures within the framework of this bill. We are merely talking here about a system of wage and price controls. I will emphasize again that we find it impossible, notwithstanding that there is sympathy for controls, to accept the request of the government for a blank cheque until December 31, 1978. If after 18 months, on April 30, 1977, we fully understand the motive for these controls, which are to nullify, to affect somehow the inflation psychology which has been rampant in this country for years but which the government stubbornly refused to recognize—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Turner (London East)): Order, please. I regret to interrupt the hon. member but his time has expired. He may continue with unanimous consent. Is there unanimous consent?

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

Mr. Lambert (Edmonton West): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank hon. members for their indulgence. I will not abuse it.

As I was saying, the government steadfastly refused to recognize that this inflation psychology existed in the country. I do not know where the Prime Minister read his book on present day economics, but at least now he has come up with the idea of controls. Certainly we agree that something has to be done, and that the inflation psychology has to be operated on within 18 months. Surely to goodness if the program is working, then the government can come back to parliament with a bill to continue or to modify the program. If the government is accomplishing what it has set out to do with regard to inflation—not licking inflation, because this program alone cannot do it—then I am sure the government will find the members of my party fully in support.

● (1750)

However, on the other hand, if the program is failing to accomplish its job, the country should not be saddled with a monster until December, 1978, and potentially beyond. After all, under this program there will be a massive intrusion by government into the economy. There is the potential of forever, shall we say, putting government into all aspects of the business of the country, particularly if it is there for a period of almost four years, and certainly if it is continued beyond that. That is what the minister should have said is frightening. He should have said that clause 20 (8) is frightening.

It is for those additional reasons, among others, that the Leader of the Opposition, consistent with the views he expressed right at the very beginning and all the way through, and the members of this party insist that with regard to this proposal dealing with income controls it should be for 18 months, and 18 months alone.

That is the amendment we are now considering, but we could have had additional amendments. I did propose one, which I am concerned about, in addition to that which particularly bothers the Leader of the Opposition. I put my amendment in committee. We were faced with some zero amendments, nondescript amendments dealing with marketing boards and runaway amendments from government members who took up the balance of the time, under the guillotine, and of course the net result was that there was no opportunity to debate either the amendment put forward by my colleague, the hon. member for York-Simcoe (Mr. Stevens), or the amendment of the Leader of the Opposition, or mine.

I thank hon. members for these additional minutes, and I hope the arguments we have made with regard to this bill will commend themselves to the House.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Lorne Nystrom (Yorkton-Melville): Mr. Speaker, the motion before the House moved by the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Stanfield) asks that this program not last longer than April 30, 1977. I fail to understand the logic behind a motion of this sort after listening to the hon. member for Edmonton West (Mr. Lambert), the Leader of the Opposition, and other members of the Conservative party because they have now taken the position that they are condemning the program.

It seems to me that if they condemn the program so strongly they should be interested in making sure the program does not come into effect, using whatever parliamentary power and muscle they have unless of course the government is willing to amend the program to make it more acceptable to them. It strikes me as very strange that they would move a motion which would accept the program for 18 months while still condemning it loudly from the other side of their mouths.

All along our party has taken a very clear and consistent approach in the debate on this bill. We have been saying that this legislation is not fair, not equitable, and will not work in Canada at this time. It will not have any real impact on making a more equitable and just society or economy than we have today. We said at the outset that this program is essentially a wage control program. It will not be concerned with controlling prices or profits in a serious way. When it comes to controlling prices, there are many loopholes.

The government says that it wants to control profits at the end of the year, but it will control profits at 95 per cent of their level over the last five years. This strikes me as rather strange, particularly when wages will be controlled at a level whereby the rate of increase will go progressively down from 10 per cent to 8 per cent to 6 per cent, if workers receive their 2 per cent productivity increase. At the same time the profit level which is to be controlled will actually go up because it will be 95 per cent of the last five year average, and in the last five years profits have been very high.

However, if we go back five years, profits were at a lower level as they went through the regular business cycle. As we move along, the profit average for the last five years will be higher next year and the year after than it