

Cost of Living

I think that these are measures that we should consider seriously if we really want to correct the problems we are all facing and to alleviate the discouragement of Canadians.

Everyday, some views are conveyed to us that it is now very onerous if not impossible for a young married couple to be able to buy a house. I believe we should give serious consideration to those possibilities.

Of course, I would accept other such valuable alternatives maybe more than those I am now suggesting. For a long time we have asking for the abolition of the 11 per cent tax on building materials—it is not a new idea—as well as lower interest rates to encourage all Canadians and we would demonstrate that we have moved in the right direction in the battle against inflation.

● (0050)

[*English*]

Mr. William C. Frank (Middlesex): Mr. Speaker, I rise as yet another member of this House who is concerned about where this country is heading with the government we find attempting to lead us today. Perhaps the best way to explain what this debate is all about would be to quote from the *Financial Times* editorial of this week. I quote:

The new bundle of anti-inflation measures which Prime Minister Trudeau presented to Parliament and the country last week has a make-shift, grab-bag feel to it. The commodities Mr. Trudeau chose for specific action—wheat, milk and petroleum products—have little in common except that they may be the targets of consumer complaint. The increase to \$12 a month in the monthly family allowance seems to have been selected because it could be done quickly and was likely to be popular.

In no way are these measures in themselves, or in conjunction with the measures announced three weeks before, a coherent program for fighting inflation. They seem to be aimed more at soothing the consumers and placating the New Democratic Party in the hope that inflation will eventually cure itself.

If we are setting out on a course of economic isolation, the strategy should be debated as such and its implications should be carefully considered. It should not be casually adopted in the course of a short-term and piecemeal fight against some of the symptoms of inflation.

It should be clearly realized that the benefits to Canadian consumers in the form of lower prices than world prices are at the expense, not of foreigners, but of other Canadians who are the producers of the commodities in question.

The government does not give the impression that it knows what it is doing. This would be bad enough even if the policies were only short-term expedients. It is much worse if a new long-term strategy is being slapped together without counting the cost or making a sensible estimate of the chances of success.

I do not want to leave the impression my whole speech is made up of quotations, but I feel yet another comment of a famous columnist in the *Ottawa Citizen* of September 12 sums up a practical solution to this dilemma. I quote:

To my mind, the best speech in the inflation debate was made by the Conservative member for Don Valley, James Gillies, the man who would be finance minister should Stanfield form a cabinet.

Gillies is one of the most competent men to come to parliament in recent times, and there seems no reason to doubt he would be a competent minister of finance.

The writer finishes by saying, and I quote:

Mr. Gillies did not need to point out that the government may recognize the need for such a policy before long—it has had just such a contingency plan ready for almost a year, and if inflation continues to mount it may well be brought into effect.

[Mr. La Salle.]

If it is, it will not matter that the other parties said the Conservatives were crazy—the Liberals will put it forward as though it were the most sensible plan in the world, and doubtless they will have the support of the New Democrats and Social Crediters in the process.

If only the Conservatives were being robbed, it might not be so bad. Trouble is, I get the feeling we're all being robbed.

Nothing could exemplify the trend of this debate tonight better than what I have just cited. What puzzles me is that every time members of the party to my left speak, they go to great lengths in trying to criticize us. If we do not have any plans that are worth anything, why do they spend so much time criticizing us? It is obvious that they and the government know full well who is the threat and who will be forming the next government.

I want to dwell for a few minutes on some points members of the other opposition parties may not know and government members will not want to hear. As members know, the committee on trends in food prices met many days and heard many witnesses. I wish to commend the chairman of that committee, the hon. member for Sarnia-Lambton (Mr. Cullen), on the fair way in which he chaired that committee. After meeting for many weeks and listening to witness after witness, the committee did not seem to be making much progress. Pressure was on the government to do something. The government set up the infamous prices review board chaired by Mrs. Plumptre. History will refer to this committee as the Plumptre committee. Judging from the performance of that board, it will probably go down in history as having been grafted with lemon branches.

Instead of looking at the positive side, the committee on food prices looks at the negative side. A good example of that was the presentation which the hon. member for Kenora-Rainy River (Mr. Reid) spent a great deal of time in making. I am sorry he is not in the House. I would like to compliment him on a very good speech. New members have not heard him speak up to this point. His speaking reminds me of the adage that when the cat is away, the mouse will play. The trends in food prices committee cost the taxpayers the minimum. It was composed of members of parliament who found time in their busy schedule to attend the committee meetings. There was virtually no extra cost to the country.

The food prices review board was established at a considerable cost, not to mention the army of price tag analysts going around the country at a cost of \$6,000 to \$10,000 a day. In her frustration, the chairman of that board said "write your MP". In committee last week, I stated she had said "pester the MP's". I will check the newspaper clipping to clarify that, at least for my part. I will give her the benefit of the doubt since she claims she did not say "pester", but "write" your MP. This is an example of how irresponsible she can be. It remains to be seen whether she consulted the rest of the members of the board. Mrs. Plumptre and the other board members receive almost \$1,000 a day to sit, even though up to that point there had only been three meetings. They are the ones who were appointed by the government to try to solve the problem.

My comments were interpreted in a newspaper article which states "MP says he is pestered over food costs". It further states that I do not appreciate being called by my constituents and makes other nonsensical statements.