

Anti-Inflation Act

out earlier, it was already too late to correct the malaise that was felt in Canada.

Mr. Speaker, I remember quite well that two years before October 1975, the then leader of our party toured the country to warn Canadians against the dangers they were faced with because of inflation. But the government did not want to listen to the wise advice of our leader. The government, thinking that they knew everything, did not want to listen. However, they were well aware that politically, this could affect their popularity.

I will come back to what happened in 1974 later because some things are not so easy to forget. In 1975, nearly everyone was penalized by this board, all the sectors of our society, from the farmers to the labourers, and even the businessmen were penalized. People became more and more concerned and investments started to slow down. This is the result: we know the problems which we have had in the last two years and which are growing worse.

You may wonder why, Mr. Speaker. It is because we got off on the wrong foot. Yet, it was clear at the time that the cooperation and the support of provinces were needed and even essential, because I believe that at the time, in view of the decision made, provincial areas of jurisdictions were already being ignored. The government did not obtain the cooperation of unions, which was essential, nor that of business. Without the support and the cooperation essential for the effectiveness of this approach, the task was already doomed to failure; it was already impossible. This put the board in a difficult position since it had more often than not to oppose either the unions, the businessmen or the provinces, and this caused continuous confrontation, with the deplorable results that I mentioned earlier and that we must recognize.

Of course, we have been recommending this decontrol period for some time because, in view of the failure to meet these objectives, something should have been done a long time ago and the various sectors of the Canadian economy have been waiting for a long time for the government to take a position and they want to know exactly what the government is going to do.

Mr. Speaker, if the provinces, labour unions, the business community and economic sectors did not show much interest for the imposition of those measures, it is because already, in October 1975, people were showing that loss of confidence in this government. One has only to check the figures, and I will spare you all those statistical data for others before me have quoted them, but one has only to compare with our American neighbours who, without this tool, have fared a lot better than us.

I am not saying that they did not have any problems with the increasing cost of living or inflation, but they have come through without any controls, through persuasion, a better will and, probably, because of the much greater public confidence they had in their government than Canadians did in theirs. In my opinion, in a situation such as the one we are in now it is important to have confidence. The Minister of Finance (Mr. Chrétien) is calling for this confidence on the part of the

[Mr. La Salle.]

opposition parties, and he hopes to gain the confidence of Canadians about the anti-inflation measures he has announced a few months ago and those he will be announcing in the coming days. Mr. Speaker, it is hard to trust the government when we see its economic record and the results of its policies. It is hard and I will even say it is impossible to support the government when it tells us about all kinds of expectations, knowing full well that all our economic forecasts have proven awfully false for too long and particularly so during these past ten years. So, right from the beginning, the objective set by the government was unreachable and the government knew it. But, Mr. Speaker, they had to win the 1974 election. So, two years before the enforcement of these controls, in 1975, the Progressive Conservative party had already warned the government about the dangers of these controls and the misery in which they would throw all Canadians. And the member for Bonaventure-Îles-de-la-Madeleine (Mr. Béchard) knows quite well what he was advocating in 1974 like so many others. They crisscrossed the country and we saw what I would call the scandal of the century: all the Liberal members of the House and all those who were running for the Liberals stubbornly refused to believe in price controls, in a 90-day wage and price freeze.

● (2112)

This 90-day period, which was omitted when the controls were applied, would have given us and any government the time required to seek and obtain the support and the co-operation that are essential to the effectiveness of these measures. It has been swept aside. But what is most repugnant is that the government had promised it would never apply such controls and it tricked the business world, the unions, the workers, the provinces and this side of the House. The government was scaring Canadians with the proposal we were putting forward. It had been studied and we had the feeling it was already urgent.

We were asking the government to take action, and that was well before 1974. It did not respond, at least not before having categorically promised all Canadians that the government elected in 1974 would never apply controls. I said some time ago that this government had deliberately and openly lied to every component of the Canadian society, and I was asked to take back what I was saying because I could not prove it. I see the hon. member who must indeed feel embarrassed, he who in October 1975 was compelled to obediently submit to the decisions taken by this Prime Minister, to stay quiet and hope his constituents would forget he had ever stood up for this position.

Oh, yes, Mr. Speaker, I am convinced of that. I repeat everywhere that this government lied openly to the Canadian people in 1974, and that is why it deserves to lose the confidence of the people from day to day as it does.

Mr. Portelance: That is not true!

Mr. La Salle: An old proverb says that he who has lied will lie, Mr. Speaker. Today, the minister introduces before us a