

Anti-Inflation Act

● (2030)

This bill is meant for companies with 500 employees or more, but it asks all other small businesses to abide by it voluntarily. This legislation does not control imports nor exports. It does not deal either with collective agreements signed before October 14 or during the last fiscal year. This legislation indeed is voluntary.

There is much confusion about this bill, Mr. Speaker, and now we see it. Judging by the reaction of unions, without approving that reaction, it remains that we can take for granted that the main unions are not willing to co-operate with the government.

Mr. Speaker, I wished to point out tonight that if a voluntary anti-inflation program is to succeed it must obtain the approval of a majority of Canadians. Now under the present economic and social circumstances, inflation has already claimed its victims. Mr. Speaker, the government is simply too late. Like many others, I wonder if Canada will be the fourteenth country to fail in its fight against inflation. First, the government does not deal at all with the banking or monetary system. Not at all. The Minister of Finance (Mr. Macdonald) even admitted several times in the House that he has no control over interest rates.

I refer here to a document published by the government and entitled "Highlights of the Anti-inflation Program of the Canadian Government". On page 17, we can read the following:

Even though it is impossible to control interest rates set on financial markets.

Mr. Speaker, who then controls the economic blood of the country? Who controls the purchasing power of the citizens if the Minister of Finance himself, in his official documentation, admits that he has no control over interest rates? In that case, Mr. Speaker, whether the anti-inflation legislation of the government lasts two months, ten months, eighteen months or thirty-six months, in its fight against inflation to protect individuals and businesses from this monster that we call inflation, the government must strike at the root of this evil, namely our economic system. Someone laughed. Some believe that the Social Credit solutions are not valid, that they are only for show, but the present situation has made thousands of victims, and the government is establishing a restriction program which applies precisely to the less-favored people. People who earn \$24,000 a year will be entitled this year to a \$2,400 salary increase thanks to the anti-inflation program of the government. People who earn \$7,000 will be entitled to a paltry \$700 increase. That is the justice, or the fair treatment of the government as concerns certain citizens. It allows those who are highest paid to obtain more and those who earn less to obtain less, while inflation affects everyone, whatever their financial situation, their job, the area or the country where they live.

Mr. Speaker, this fight against inflation is a joke because it does not attack the real problem which is the economic system. The minister said in his speech of October 14, and I quote:

If we do not succeed in working together in a firm spirit of national determination, our situation will only get worse.

[Mr. Fortin.]

Mr. Speaker, if the minister is really serious in inviting Canadians to support the anti-inflation program, he himself and the government will have to take measures or introduce proposals to the House with a view to dealing fairly with all Canadians.

Mr. Speaker, Dominion and Steinberg, two very big food chains in Canada, have been conducting a colossal advertising campaign in the newspapers in the last few days, saying that all their prices are frozen except those of perishable products. The Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs (Mr. Ouellet) was boasting yesterday that that meant a first step towards the success of his program, which is entirely false. The Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs does not know that Dominion and Steinberg find it an advantage to refuse to negotiate now with the leaders of their employees' union, under the pretext that Bill C-73 has not yet been passed and thus setting the atmosphere of negotiation or intimidation to their employees. I know people who work for Dominion and Steinberg, two giant food products chains that practically control food marketing in Canada, one of the vital sectors of our economy. I once showed in a speech I made in the House all the ramifications of the Dominion and Steinberg empire, shopping centres, real estate and so on. Dominion and Steinberg refuse to negotiate with their employees, preferring to hide behind the government's legislation to force them to accept a 10 per cent hike. Mr. Speaker, there are threats of strikes in both these chain stores now, and the government wants us to believe it is serious. In its fight against inflation, the government is siding with the minority in Canada and wilfully turns its back on the majority of the people by supporting the banking establishment, the major chains of food supply and marketing. That is the government's scheme. It is based on voluntary restraint, but it does not rely on the good will of all Canadians which make up the larger part of the Canadian population. It merely calls upon the richer to set the example, which is easy for them, after having been the main beneficiaries of inflation for the past three, four or five years. But it is the small-wage earners working in plants who are imposed a maximum hike ceiling of 10 per cent today. In my city of Victoriaville, where the average salary is between \$7,000 and \$8,000, the average worker will be entitled to an \$800 hike this year.

But they have been the first victims of inflation for the past five years. The government always refused to act, and it will be remembered on this side of the House that the government always replied that inflation in Canada was beyond control because it was imported by foreigners. This government kept repeating that there was nothing it could do about inflation since it had no control over it. They said it was imported from England and any other country, particularly Europe and the eastern bloc. Well, Mr. Speaker, to behold all of a sudden Canada can fight, calls on the working force, and to convince them, does not touch the banking system of the minimum wage and gives no measure of protection to small wage earners. It is going after big corporations. But, Mr. Speaker, we see the result of that. Dominion and Steinberg used that to continue to oppress their own employees. That is what I call intimidation. That is what I call rubbish. And then the minister tells us in his motions that it is very important to know how long those measures will last. Mr. Speaker, I think