

Price Control

asked parliament to empower it through a stated mechanism to act in defence of the Canadian consumer in respect of oil prices should the case arise. And parliament gave it that power. Why not ask parliament now for similar powers?

● (1240)

Mr. Speaker, last fall I introduced in the Committee on Trends in Food Prices a motion which called upon that committee to recommend to parliament that the powers of the Food Prices Review Board be strengthened by giving it the ability to require the rollback of unwarranted price increases. I had hoped that if government members would not lend their support to this motion, at least my hon. friends in the Conservative Party would. I remind the House, Mr. Speaker, particularly in view of reports on events that took place yesterday afternoon in the Committee on Miscellaneous Estimates, that on that and previous occasions neither Liberals nor Conservatives on the committee would agree to recommend to the House that the government give this power to the Food Prices Review Board. Why? Notwithstanding all their spurious objections, I suggest the reason is that the Conservatives are no more anxious than members of the government to challenge the traditional right of the business community to set prices as it sees fit and to call the shots in the marketplace.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Grier: All the twittering in committee and in this House will not disguise that fundamental fact.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Lambert (Edmonton West): Why don't you talk about last night in the committee?

Mr. Grier: I listened to the speeches made by members of the Conservative Party in this House to see whether they had something to offer Canadians in respect of the problem of inflation and I came to this conclusion: in the last year the principal and indeed only recommendation which distinguishes them from any other party in this House is their adherence to the notion of wages and prices control. As recently as two or three nights ago, the hon. member for St. John's East (Mr. McGrath) was interviewed on the CBC television network about the recent increase in the Consumer Price Index, particularly with respect to food. He said "Our approach is a prices and incomes policy", which is another way of saying wage and price controls. I will be very interested, when the hon. member speaks this afternoon, to hear how such a policy is going to change the price of potatoes in Canada, the price of sugar being imported, and the price of beef, and how it is going to affect the price of food in Canada, how that policy is going to affect the well-being of the Canadian people. I am tired of listening to the empty promises of the Leader of the Opposition who says that he has the will. He may have the will but he has not got the means or the policies. All he can offer Canadians is the most discredited economic strategy now alive in the world.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

[Mr. Grier.]

Mr. Grier: A strategy, I remind him, which brought the British economy to its knees, which defeated the Conservative government in that country and which has been disproven in the United States as well.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, since the proposals of the hon. member for Don Valley (Mr. Gillies) and his party make no sense economically, I ask myself why they are so hung up on wage control. I began to get the answer this week as I listened to the hon. member for St. Paul's (Mr. Atkey) speak on the competition bill and urge the government to apply the principles of anticombines legislation against the labour movement. I heard the hon. member for Prince George-Peace River (Mr. Oberle) in a private members' bill attack the principle of organized labour in Canada. I began to sense that the matter is quite simple: the Conservative Party does not like labour and is not interested in seeing the collective bargaining process take place.

An hon. Member: We don't like the abuses.

Mr. Grier: The Conservative Party is trying to persuade the Canadian people that the working man of Canada is not important. They want to control his wages and are pretending to Canadians that their discredited and misbegotten strategy is going to solve the problem of inflation. Mr. Speaker, at whatever political risk is entailed, I intend to say to Canadians—that is a bunch of nonsense.

An hon. Member: Yours is pure hypocrisy.

Mr. Grier: My hon. friends cry that I am being hypocritical. No one could know better than Conservatives the meaning of hypocrisy.

The hon. member for Don Valley has talked on a number of occasions about breaking inflationary expectations. He might better have said blunt bludgeoning of inflationary expectations. How does wage control break inflationary expectations? It would break the legitimate expectations of the Canadian people and wreck the economy.

Mr. Speaker, if you want to break inflationary expectations in this country I suggest you empower the government to intervene selectively to roll back those price increases which cannot be justified. You indicate to the business community in this country that you are serious about stepping in and protecting the consumer and at the same time you say, "Where your costs can be justified then we will not impose some unreasonable and artificial control". If the Conservative Party cannot see how that makes common sense, I beg to inform them that increasingly the Canadian people can see that it makes sense.

An hon. Member: How much more time have you got? We can only stand so much of this.

Mr. Grier: The motion before the House today does not deliberately insist that this power of rollback be necessarily invested in a Prices Review Board, although that would be our preference. Our concern is that this government or some agency of this government be empowered to act in the matter of rollback.

My hon. friends are so obsessed with titles and the names of agencies that they miss the main point. What we need is the power to intervene. The agency or mechanism which carries out the intervention is surely a secondary