

Anti-Inflation Act

The hon. member continued:

I repeat, that as far as we are concerned, this aspect is totally unacceptable and simply will not wash. We will be proposing an amendment at the appropriate stages of committee and later to deal with this, and in our view failure to provide something to cover this problem, so that we will not be in a position—

Here it is, Mr. Speaker:

—where we sit here until 1978 waiting for the government to decide whether to extend the legislation, is unacceptable. We will propose an amendment which will provide that at an earlier date during the life of this legislation, this House will have, as it must, the right to decide whether under the circumstances which then exist the extension of the legislation is warranted.

We are not attempting to shorten the program. We say the government is asking this House to wait a long time to decide on extending the program, and we say this cannot happen in light of the powers and the circumstances of this legislation. The minister himself said this legislation was most terrifying.

Mr. Macdonald (Rosedale): Frightening.

Mr. Lambert (Edmonton West): Yes, frightening. I quite agree with him. This afternoon I had occasion to reread the proceedings in 1955 dealing with the Defence Production Act. I do not know whether the father of the hon. member for Mississauga (Mr. Abbott) was then a minister of the Crown. He had been shortly before. But we all know about the Defence Production Act debate in 1955, when this House refused to give consent and the government acceded to the opposition in the House in respect of granting absolute powers to the governor in council and giving the government a completely blank cheque.

What is the House asked to do in Bill C-73? Under clause 20 (8) there is granted to the administrator the power to make any order which can contravene any and all acts that this parliament has passed or is likely to pass during the duration of this legislation. Someone in the New Democratic Party said that they were rather disappointed that the official opposition opposed this bill only for the reason of its duration. Somehow or other—and I am surprised at this—they have missed the implications of clause 20 (8). I recall the absolute indignation, in fact the violent protest, of the former leader of the New Democratic Party when he saw the provisions and what was meant by the War Measures Act in October, 1970, and how civil rights were forgotten. Let me read what appears on pages 21 and 22 of Bill C-73:

An order of the Administrator made pursuant to subsection (1), paragraph (2)(a), (4)(a) or (5)(a) is binding on the person against whom it is made notwithstanding any agreement that was entered into after October 13, 1975 (whether before or after the order was made), notwithstanding any other Act or law enacted or made before or after the coming into force of this act, and notwithstanding that the order conflicts with anything that was established in accordance with or approved pursuant to any such other act or law.

● (1740)

Is that not the biggest blank cheque that this House had been asked to write in favour of an official named under this legislation? It is not a blank cheque to the governor in council, the governor in council being responsible in theory, at least, to this House. But we being asked to approve a provision stating that an appointed official, whose acts are barely reviewable except perhaps in law,

[Mr. Lambert (Edmonton West).]

can make an order that is contrary to all acts that have been passed, save one.

Mr. Benjamin: Then why would you want him for 18 months?

Mr. Lambert (Edmonton West): That shows how slow the hon. member is because an amendment was put in committee to eliminate that section and to provide for the protection of civil liberties. Unfortunately, when the vote came, there was no representative for the NDP there to support that amendment.

The only exception is the Canadian Bill of Rights which states in clear and unequivocal terms that for it to be set aside there must be a specific provision in a subsequent act which says that the Canadian Bill of Rights is set aside. That is not done in this bill and therefore the Canadian Bill of Rights will stand. But that is all that stands. Strangely enough Bill C-72, the Canadian Human Rights Act, which is on the order paper, is excluded because I am sure government members hope that the House will pass that bill. But why pass it? They will have passed Bill C-73 which sets it aside.

We are asked also why we oppose this bill. We accepted in principle the question of controls, but our leader has indicated the conditions on which we accepted the government proposals. We do not write a blank cheque from the very beginning and say that we will accept government proposals and explanations sight unseen. I agree that we also have some reservations with regard to some of the loopholes and difficulties we see in the bill, but we admit also that a system of controls is difficult and, as our leader has said, there are some elements of rough justice. But, my goodness, surely the cancer of inflation which has moved on to the Canadian scene has been growing over these past many years with no intervention from the government.

Inflation is continuing notwithstanding the fact that the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) said in 1970 that they had licked inflation, and on a subsequent occasion said they would wrestle it to the ground. The only way in which they have done any wrestling with inflation is to take something partly from somebody else's program and to show that it is imperfect and creates more rough justice than it should—and I put the emphasis on the word "rough". There were other statements by the chairman and vice-chairman of the Anti-Inflation Board that if they had had their preference they would have preferred a 90 day freeze.

An hon. Member: Rubbish.

Mr. Lambert (Edmonton West): The hon. member for Mississauga (Mr. Abbot) made that statement in a partisan manner because, after all, I am sure he has great respect for the chairman and the vice-chairman of the Anti-Inflation Board. The transcript will show that both the chairman and the vice-chairman said that if they had had their preference they would have preferred a freeze on prices and incomes because, as the chairman said, he now has nightmares thinking about the problems that are growing with prices creeping up and wage demands continuing.

It will take some time to get everything into position. I would have expected it, and personally I would have felt