

Anti-Inflation Act

The government must also be even-handed in its efforts to deal with inflation and recession. Both of these problems are still with us. It would be wrong to overlook the fact that we still have 600,000 Canadians out of work. We must have programs that deal at one and the same time with inflation and recession. Measures to increase production and productivity help solve both the inflation problem and the recession problem, since they touch on a fundamental cause of inflation, an imbalance between the supply of goods and services and the demand for them.

Ultimately, it is more productivity, rather than controls and restrictions, that will get us out of our present difficulties. Controls can, at best, give us a breathing space to take steps to restructure our economy, to take steps to deal with unreasonable expectations, and to take steps to deal with blockages and rigidities whether they are in the private sector or in the public sector.

Let me say that our aim should not be simply to tighten our belts to limit our demands to the capacity of a stagnant economy. Our aim must be to get our economy moving on a path of real growth, and thereby enable all Canadians to share in the increased prosperity that would result. The government's prices and incomes policy is a key part of such an effort. It must be balanced by effective programs to deal with unemployment and slack in the economy. This is what the public expects in terms of leadership from the government. The Canadian people will do their share when motivated by the kind of leadership the government pledged in the last election.

Mr. Speaker, Bill C-73 deserves the approval of this House on second reading. With the improvements and clarification that can be provided in committee, the bill will also deserve the final approval of this House and, what is more important, the final approval of all Canadians.

Mr. Andrew Brewin (Greenwood): Mr. Speaker, before I proceed with my speech I should like to comment on the speech of the hon. member for Windsor West (Mr. Gray). I think many of his comments and suggestions are valuable, useful and correct, though I do not share his enthusiasm for the anti-profiteering bill—now, happily, defunct. I can understand his view—he being the author, or father of it to some extent in the last parliament—but it was not much of a bill. I do not think we should spend time arguing about that, however.

I think I heard the hon. member correctly when he referred to the fact that certain details of the enforcement procedure made enforcement ineffective. In my view, the enforcement provisions are an absolute key to the efficiency and effectiveness of any legislation, more particularly this sort of legislation. If you do not have effective enforcement, if you have long delays, if you have inadequate procedures to institute the necessary actions, the whole scheme is bound to collapse.

I would have thought the logic of the hon. member's remarks would bring him to what might be a painful conclusion for him: even that he would be bound to join those in this House who say that an ineffective bill is no solution to the inflation problems of this country, and we should vote against it unless and until we have a bill with adequate enforcement provisions in it. That seems to me

to be the logical conclusion, rather than starting with high praise for the bill and its excellent intent, saying he is going to support it, and then giving what I think are effective reasons why we should not support it.

I agree with my colleagues who have said this is basically a wage and salary control measure. I agree that it does provide some pretence of control of profits and prices, but I think it is fairly ineffective. The pretence that there is effective price control in this legislation, or spelled out in the government's white paper on the subject, is completely without foundation. I, personally, would like to repeat the view which I believe the hon. member for Oshawa-Whitby (Mr. Broadbent) expressed, that the scheme is unfair and inequitable on the one hand, and unworkable on the other.

I do not intend to repeat all the arguments that have been made to support this proposition which was very clearly spelled out by my leader and other colleagues, but I want to deal with one subject. I think we are being asked, when presented with this bill for second reading, to give a blank cheque to the government to abdicate our functions. There is practically nothing definite in the legislation. It is just a framework within which we tell the government to go ahead and prepare a scheme. I do not think it is good enough that parliament should be put in that position. This is an extremely important matter and we are considering extremely important legislation. I think we should have a very clear picture of some form of draft regulations, or at least an understanding that until the regulations, which are the key to the scheme, are ready, the bill would not be proclaimed.

This paper "The Attack on inflation," vague as it is in spots, while it is helpful, in my view is not law at all. It is just a statement of the intentions of the Minister of Finance (Mr. Macdonald) on the matter. Until we have some indication of what is going into the regulations, we will not know what we are imposing upon the people of Canada; we will not know what we are legislating about.

Certainly the crisis of inflation is no surprise. It is not something that loomed on the horizon a few weeks ago; it has been well known for years. It is worldwide. I would have thought that in the interval the government could have worked out prospective regulations to enable it, when it became necessary to come before the House and ask for this power, to explain clearly the power it was seeking. In my judgment, it would be irresponsible for parliament to pass this bill in its present form.

● (1250)

I now come to the second part of my argument. The major shadow overhanging this bill is the constitutional issue. It has become fashionable to treat the constitution as something which interests lawyers, as something about which the law officers of the Crown consult when the government wants to do something in order that they may assure the government that it can do as it wants. But we live under a constitution. We live under a federal system in Canada which spells out the functions of various governments. The courts have determined questions of constitutional jurisdiction. In the final analysis, the assessment whether this legislation is constitutionally valid or otherwise will depend upon the Supreme Court of Canada. I suggest that the constitutional arguments have not been answered adequately.