

*Labour Conditions*

Then, we merely say: What does the government do to ward off inflation? What can we do against inflation? Many things. For instance, there is what we wrongly believed in 1974 when we said to the parties: Try to lower your sight as regards both wage and price increases, that is use the voluntary system among unions and businesses. That proved to be a complete failure. It took the English workers, the Trade Union Congress, which is as important as the Canadian Labour Congress, to defeat two socialist governments before accepting, in 1975, the voluntary control of salary increases. They destroyed their own political party before accepting voluntarily salary restrictions. We tried the same approach in 1974. Some ask: How come you have changed your mind? We have changed our mind because we were wrong, and this I confess, we were wrong in believing that the various parties would voluntarily accept to restrict their claims, price increases, and so on. This was not done. I have always entertained very serious doubts about that because, precisely, our collective bargaining system is not based on a rational process but exclusively—perhaps not exclusively but almost so—on the balance of forces between the parties. That is how our system works. Not only is it working like that, but people want to keep it that way.

The right hon. Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) has met Mr. Morris some time ago—and Mr. Morris has said so in an interview he had given—in an attempt to convince the Canadian Labour Congress and all the other trade unions that we must try and widen the scope of the collective wage agreement.

It is precisely because we had problems like the handling of western grain when either the grain handlers, the railway workers or the longshoremen went on strike in the West. That is when we see the western members of the New Democratic Party torn between two things, between their so-called labour constitution and the interests of farmers that they want to keep on their side. Obviously the government must legislate all these people back to work.

For that matter, the Conservatives take the same position: What is the government doing to put an end to the strike? Yet all we wanted was first to prevent the grain handlers from going on strike and from stopping the movement of grain in the West, and then to prevent the railway workers and longshoremen from going on strike. And Mr. Morris said: "What Mr. Trudeau wants is to centralize." But that makes a lot of sense and when there is a strike affecting western farmers, I am anxious to see what will be the attitude of our good friends of the New Democratic Party. Why did they not tell the farmers: Come on, pay more, let the workers get more. No, all we get is a big silence and the usual attitude from people who are afraid to stick their necks out.

Mr. Speaker, we had the choice of referring to the parties and in so doing, true democracy would have prevailed. If both parties, the union and the employer, had said: Because of inflation, since it is in the national interest to do so, we shall try to restrict our demands. But this cannot be done and it does not mean there is a lack of good will but the system is built that way. The unions in our country are modelled after the capitalistic pattern. I am not implying they are capitalistic but they bargain in the same way.

[Mr. Marchand (Langelier).]

Some asked: What is the Wagner Act?. When the Wagner Act was passed in the United States, in 1934, what did it offer which was really new? Two things. It gave the unions the sole responsibility for union representations and at the same time it protected the employer against the AFL-CIO wrangling over union jurisdictions in the United States.

Both parties were very pleased with this extraordinary solution which Roosevelt had found, because the union had the monopoly of representations and the employer was protected against interunion competition. How does the system work out? It operates in such a way that the party which is in a power position will take as much as it can out of the other at a given moment. That is the way it operates.

● (2140)

And that is exactly what the employer does with prices when he tries to get all the market can bear, that is the customers can pay. Now, in times of crises, that cannot be allowed, so the system must be changed slightly. There are those who claim or have claimed that the Anti-Inflation Act denies free collective bargaining. That is not true, Mr. Speaker. To say that is sheer demagoguery. During the war, we had the Wartime Prices and Trade Act. Everything was frozen. The only increases allowed were limited to 25 cents per percentage point increase in the cost of living index. In addition, attempts were made to eliminate glaring disparities and injustices, that is to say, labour councils were only allowed to grant increases where glaring injustices or disparities existed. They had full discretionary powers in that regard. They could deny or remove the right to strike and, notwithstanding that, the labour movement survived, Mr. Speaker. Not only did it survive but it became stronger during the war. I did not like the system. I was in the labour movement at the time and felt naturally that it was a burden for the strongest. For the strongest unions, it was a burden, but for the weaker, it was some sort of relief because, as they could not resort to strikes, they went before the Wartime Labour Board and through it got the salary increases they could not have obtained through their own economic strength.

We have the choice between free negotiations between the parties, bearing in mind the common good, or resorting to a system of controls. We could consider controls under the War Measures Act, but it would mean that before they could be implemented, many would have been strangled by inflation in the country.

Then that solution was put aside. So we tried to attain our end promptly without depriving unnecessarily the workers and the employers of their basic rights, while keeping as much freedom as possible and avoiding setting up a whole institution which would have taken a very long time to build and a very long time to destroy, because I was in the group who came here in Ottawa in 1946-47 with Pat Conroy and Percy Bengough. We came here and asked for the maintenance of price and salary controls, since we were afraid that prices would soar because of the shortages due to the war. I came here in Ottawa. Maybe several members were not even born at that time. They do not know what happened, but I do, and the labour movement was asking for this.

Some hon. members speak of the right to appeal. The way they want to interpret it means on the whole that they