

*Anti-Inflation Act*

University of Montreal in 1961 when the Prime Minister was a professor of constitutional law.

This matter has been raised by my leader and by the right hon. member for Prince Albert. In reading the provisions of the bill, I note there is a very careful distinction between the basis on which it proceeds the preamble, and the preamble in the legislation passed during the course of the last world war. I do not know whether this is because the government has doubts about its own legislative capacity. That doubt may be maintained because they have not seen fit to exempt the provinces. I do not object; I merely say that a fair survey of the provisions of the bill indicates that the government doubts its own legislative capacity.

● (1430)

When the minister replies to end the debate, I hope he will tell the House if it is intended that this legislation shall abrogate the Bill of Rights. One provision of this bill is that the provisions of the act shall apply notwithstanding any other legislative proposals existing in any other acts of this country. Does the government intend the Bill of Rights to be subordinate to this legislation? I ask this because on the order paper there is a bill dealing with human rights, a bill which will be far reaching in its effect. Does the government intend this bill to override the human rights legislation? Perhaps the minister will answer these questions when he closes the debate.

I hope that any defects which may exist with respect to powers the government seeks will be met by the pursuit of a vigilant course of communication between the federal government and the provinces, to ensure that if a bill is finally produced it is acceptable to this House. That cannot be said of the bill we are looking at now. We hope that the bill will be not constitutionally unsound or susceptible to challenge by provinces which are unwilling to submit to the federal jurisdiction.

It appears that this bill will go to a standing committee. Let me make it quite clear that it is not the intention of my party to hold up the legislation unnecessarily. That is far from our purpose. But we should be failing in our duty to our party, our constituents and our country if, on a measure as important as this, we do not take every reasonable opportunity to cross-examine officials as to the meaning of certain clauses—unless the minister can demonstrate a knowledge, later, which he has not indicated so far—to secure explanations, to move amendments, some of which I have indicated, and to some extent at least to allow for the calling of witnesses and the presentation of briefs.

I want to make it clear that in our opinion this does not mean that the committee should be thrown open for the whole world to appear. This would cause difficulties. To some extent, time is of the essence. But having in mind what I observe to be the approach of the chairman and vice-chairman of the proposed Anti-Inflation Review Board, I suggest that there is obviously some lack of understanding and comprehension of what is involved on their part and they might well appear before the committee to obtain some on-the-job training and experience which they have not had so far. It is absolutely essential to give representatives of labour, business and of consumers the opportunity to appear before the committee and give

[Mr. Baldwin.]

their views, so that they can discover what is involved in the legislation, ask questions and present their points of view.

I suggest to the minister and to the government that if government supporters on the committee are determined not to allow this kind of committee investigation, they will be doing a disservice to the committee, to parliament and to the general opportunity to introduce a program which will work. It will be far better to seek some indication at the committee stage of the problems and difficulties which are liable to occur, so that administrators and tribunals may plan accordingly, rather than wait until the actual foul-up takes place, a foul-up which would necessitate their doing these things after the event. For this reason, I make it plain that when the bill goes to the committee we will hold the government to be completely in the wrong if it should attempt to railroad the measure through without the kind of careful study it deserves.

I want to conclude on a note of caution. I think we all realize the problems which exist for any government at this time in connection with the administration of the affairs of the people they are governing. To govern today is often to have to make a choice between a number of alternatives, usually unpalatable, difficult and sometimes even dangerous. The decision this government is making has become infinitely more dangerous, more difficult and more unpalatable because it has refused obstinately until now to do anything to curb inflation in this country in a realistic manner. Consequently, the medicine they are proposing will be far harder to swallow.

I do not like government intervention. I do not like controls. I do not like being part of a legislature, nor would I like to be part of a government, which faces the duty of having to legislate for and establish guidelines and restraints on prices and compensation in order to deal with a highly inflammable situation. It is not in my nature, not in the nature of my leader, not in the nature of my party nor, I think, in the nature of the people of this country to indulge in this kind of exercise. But we are now, and have been for some considerable time, faced with the hard choice of either allowing the inflammable situation to continue until there is an explosion or taking the route our party proposed some time ago. We have always made it plain that the lesser of the two evils was action. If the sort of action we wanted many months ago to take had been taken, these problems would not have assumed their present proportions.

It now appears that reluctantly and, so far, half-heartedly on the part of the Prime Minister, the government has swung around to the same view. I note that Mr. Geoffrey Stevens, in an article published in this morning's newspaper, suggested that the Prime Minister is taking off on a countrywide educational tour. Significantly, that information came from some official, not from the Prime Minister. Many on my side of the House and many in the country feel that the Prime Minister's heart is not really in this legislation. Here is his chance to show that that impression is not right. The government's willingness to accept proposals for improving and modifying the bill will go a long way to disposing of the impression that the Prime Minister is being pushed into enacting this measure and that his mind is not on it.