

spending program. People in Canada, by and large, are receptive to a reasonable attempt by the government to give economic leadership. I suspect that if it were possible to take a full survey of public sentiment at this time, the government would find the majority of Canadians responsive to a reasonable program to attack inflation. They are in fact looking at this particular legislation with a good deal of hope and expectation.

I suggest that the bill before us today contains some very serious shortcomings. I have enunciated some of the thoughts which I have. I do not think the bill itself will be sufficient to give us any type of meaningful attack on the problem of inflation. Therefore, it is my view that there will have to be fundamental amendments to the legislation if there is to be any hope of public acceptance of the concept of controls, including a review of the whole program of controls outlined in this bill. This legislation in its present form causes me the greatest concern in terms of the prospect of the restriction of freedom of the individual.

Another aspect of the circumstances leading to the introduction of this bill causes me some concern. The Prime Minister, for reasons known only to himself, chose to make the announcement of his government's program to attack inflation on Thanksgiving Day. Why the Prime Minister made this assault on our digestion on that particular evening is difficult to understand. The program announced by the Prime Minister is a complete turn-about from the position the government took with respect to controls almost up to the time the program was announced. I think it is pretty generally agreed by most authorities on the subject that in order to have an effective system of controls there must be a high degree of public acceptance.

This principle is enunciated by people who were attached to the wartime prices and trade board during the Second World War. They state that their job was difficult even though there was at that time a compelling reason and high motivation. No less an authority than the husband of Beryl Plumptre, vice-chairman of the Anti-Inflation Board, was interviewed on television recently, and he confirmed that there must be something in the nature of general public co-operation. This point of view, no doubt, will be well made by Mrs. Plumptre, whose role, according to the Minister of Finance (Mr. Macdonald), will be to go out and sell the program with missionary zeal. I am sure that Mrs. Plumptre, having a direct relationship to the wartime prices and trade board, will have some thoughts on the difficulties of enforcing such a program as this even during wartime.

The performance of this government in connection with obtaining credibility for the program, up to this point in time in any event, has been less than satisfactory. The apparently sudden and instantaneous reversal by the Prime Minister on the question of controls will certainly have an effect on the credibility of the government's position with respect to its program. Accordingly, it seems to me that since the Prime Minister and his colleagues in cabinet have been speaking out so strongly against the program of controls up to very recently, there has not been the desired explanation by the government as to why it now expects Canadians to live up to its so-called guidelines.

Anti-Inflation Act

This apparent lack of candour displayed by the government toward the Canadian people is even more surprising, in my view, when one considers the material filed by the Minister of Finance in the House of Commons on October 14, 1975, outlining the government's program with respect to inflation, including price and wage controls. This document was not a series of hastily drafted mimeographed sheets, but a slick publication, in both official languages, reminiscent of annual reports of large corporations or government departments and agencies. This makes one think that the document had been in preparation over a period of months as opposed to weeks.

In order that any program of controls can be successful, it is absolutely essential that the government be frank and candid with the people of Canada concerning our economic circumstances. Notwithstanding the position of the Minister of Finance—and I am sorry he is not in the House today because, as I understand, he is with the representatives of the provinces; I wanted to address these comments to him in view of some of the statements he made to the House with respect to the program—I trust he will show restraint in his approach to parliament during the debate on this program and will not indulge in a provocative and argumentative debate. This type of debate will do little good in convincing Canadians of the necessity for any program of controls and, in the long run, will tend to defeat the kind of national acceptance required for the implementation of such a program.

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Quite frankly, the performance of the government up to this point has made me somewhat nervous. The public perception of the program appears to be that it has been hastily put together—although I am not certain that this is necessarily the case, in view of the material being put out by the minister and the government—and this view has been confirmed by the unfortunate press conference held by the nominees for the two top jobs on the Anti-Inflation Board. Let us, by all means, have openness of information as to what the Anti-Inflation Board is doing, but I hope the first directive by the cabinet to the board will instruct the chairman not to say or do anything further until he is adequately prepared.

I also have the belief that in the months ahead the government must periodically, through parliament, keep the Canadian people fully advised, with all the candour it has at its disposal, of the economic circumstances from here on in. If our economy is in as bad a shape as the government now says it is, this information must be forthcoming so that the general public can, in fact, pass judgment on the necessity of instituting and then continuing a program of wage and price controls.

I am not altogether hopeful that we can expect candour from this government in view of the performance we have seen over the past year, including that displayed in the period during the last election. Hon. members on the government side have not in the past few days been giving a good example to the cabinet. They have been standing up one by one, in an aura of innocence that can only be described as cherubic, to state that they have now come to the realization that inflation is the number one problem in the country. There is no trace of embarrassment in their speeches, yet this problem has been plain and clear for