

Anti-Inflation Act

proposing we adopt for the remaining period. The people in Canada are not fooled by what is going on, Mr. Speaker. They know that what we have decided to do is the right decision. It was a hard decision to arrive at; they are prepared to recognize that.

Hon. members opposite are in deep trouble, Mr. Speaker, and I will tell you why. They are calling for an end today to the controls on the economy of this country. Some of them pretend that the cost of food is too high. I was quoted as having expressed my disbelief at what I saw in the north a few days ago. When I saw the cost of food and other basic commodities in the northern territories, for instance, it was hard for me to believe that people living up there have to pay that kind of price for a loaf of bread.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

An hon. Member: This is all your fault.

● (2050)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Turner): Order, please. The minister has the floor, and I suggest we listen.

Mr. Lessard: So one day we say that the price of food here in the south is much too high. I say that it may be too high.

An hon. Member: Where is the AIB?

Mr. Lessard: But, my God, there is quite a difference with what they have to pay up north. It is a great pity that we, as a group of Canadians sitting here tonight, should consider what these people up north have to pay for food and not find a solution to bring down the price of food to a reasonable level for people in the far north.

Mr. Fraser: I wonder if through you, Mr. Speaker, the minister would accept a question.

Mr. Lessard: Sure, I am not afraid of a question.

Mr. Fraser: The minister talks about the cost of food in the north. Some of us were in the north many years ago and we know that the cost of food there has always been much higher than in the rest of the country. The minister has spent some minutes now putting that up as a straw factor in defending the government's policy.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Turner): That is not a point of order; it is a point of debate.

Some hon. Members: It is a question.

Mr. Fraser: It is not true and I suggest, through you, Mr. Speaker, that the minister is picking as an example a situation which has prevailed for the last two and a half decades.

Mr. Lessard: Mr. Speaker—

Mr. Paproski: Yes or no?

Mr. Lessard:—I tend to agree with the hon. member that the price of food up north has always been higher than down here.

An hon. Member: What are you going to do about it?

Mr. Lessard: The fact that the cost has been higher does not mean necessarily that it is O.K. for me to accept it. If I stand today in this place to speak about it, it is because I have not heard it being expressed as a major issue in this place. It should be a major issue. When the opposition starts to lash at the government because of the price of food here in Ottawa, Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver, I say to them, that that is not the real issue in this country.

Mr. Hnatyshyn: The farmers don't get any of it.

Mr. Lessard: Again I am inclined to agree with that, but what I want to raise here is the fact that tonight we are taking part in the last part of a three day debate on inflation, and I must say, from what I was able to hear and what I was able to read in the notes here on the points made by the opposition, that I have not heard anything new and, what is worse, I have not heard any proposal made—

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Lessard:—anything that would solve the situation.

An hon. Member: That is nonsense.

Mr. Lessard: I have here a resume of most of the speeches that were made by the major spokesmen of the opposition, and I find nothing in them that would reassure Canadians that there is an opposition on that side. Quite the contrary. They have no solutions to offer, none whatsoever.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Speaker, it is unfortunate because I think that my colleagues and myself, as a member of the cabinet, would have wished constructive and realistic suggestions from the opposition. Unfortunately those dear friends are very far from reality, as my colleague from Longueuil (Mr. Olivier) has pointed out, they are so far from reality, from Canadian concerns. And several Canadians I met recently in remote areas told me that in Ottawa we spend too much time discussing various subjects and that we have no opportunity to communicate directly with Canadians throughout the country. I recognize those difficulties of our duties here.

The House must necessarily hold debates and pass legislation, budgets and other things but, Mr. Speaker, if we really wish to represent public opinion and meet the interests and the needs of our constituents, we must meet them more regularly and be more aware of their needs. And this is why when we hold that kind of debate, I realize that it would be advisable to have new rules allowing hon. members representing the official opposition in a realistic way to show the bad aspects of our legislation, to show the mistakes we might be doing without extending unduly the debates and doing the contrary of what should be done here, I mean make the best possible decision,