

Price Stability

We introduced a fund of \$28 million to keep freight rates on an even keel. We never used the whole amount, but in the four years we were in power freight rates were held at the rate at which they were when we came into power, because we knew if they were increased the effect would be inflationary. Now we have government policy which definitely is inflationary and it is related to the bill which established the Canadian Transport Commission. We have mentioned this matter in the committee and in this House, to no avail.

We can anticipate that the final report of the commission, provided its life is not extended, will appear early in 1972, and the final report of the parliamentary committee upon the final report of the commission will appear some time in the late spring of 1972. That is at least two years from now. Royal commissions and parliamentary committees are often absurd enough in their own right, but to combine them as in this instance is to pile absurdity upon absurdity.

● (3:50 p.m.)

Is the government, in proposing this motion, telling the country that it intends to take no effective action to combat inflation until the Prices and Incomes Commission reports its opinion on the "causes, processes and consequences" of inflation and this new parliamentary committee then reports upon that report some time in the spring of 1972? Does the government believe that if it appoints enough royal commissions, parliamentary committees and task forces, inflation, unemployment and the rising cost of living will steal away? Is this the siren song of the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) to beguile Canadians, "Manāna, manāna and still more manāna"? Some day the Prime Minister will awaken and find he has run out of manānas and he will hear the swan song dedicated to him by the Canadian people, "Yes, we have no manānas, we have no manānas, today".

I am not one of those who put the Prime Minister down as a member of the pot generation, but I must say he shows an excessive reluctance to get off his pottie. Let us not emulate the childish habit of the Prime Minister. This government motion, proposed by the Prime Minister's colleague, the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs (Mr. Basford), whose ends perhaps are somewhat confused, is nothing but an invitation to all of us to sit in solemn silence on our collective potties while the minister, with a loud voice at

[Mr. Howe.]

one end and no responsibility at the other, burps contentedly that all is for the best in this best of all possible worlds.

We propose that if we are to have both a royal commission and a parliamentary committee, they should at least work concurrently and not consecutively. We propose that the terms of reference of the committee be widened to parallel those of the commission. This course has obvious advantages. There is the saving in time; the committee will not sit awaiting reports from the commission. There can be an avoidance of duplication; the committee need not review something that has obviously been thoroughly and exhaustively investigated by the commission.

I ask: With the great retinue of people working for the commission, why do we need to examine their reports? The committee can go on to something else and thus save the time of the commission. It is a fact that the powers of the parliamentary committee are much wider than those of the commission. Both the government and the commission have admitted that the commission is constitutionally hamstrung in the witnesses it can call and the evidence it can force to be produced. The parliamentary committee is not so chained. It can summon whom it likes, investigate whatever it likes within its terms of reference and require the production of whatever evidence it wants. The commission can use the extra powers of the parliamentary committee to assist in its investigations. Equally, the parliamentary committee can use the large and expert staff of the commission without having to build up a large, expensive staff of its own.

Time is of the essence in this inquiry into inflation if the government honestly means to seek the advice of both the parliamentary committee and the commission. By useful co-operation, the parliamentary committee and the commission can shorten the period in which the investigation is made, the interim reports are given and the final report released.

We intend to propose an amendment to this motion. If it is not accepted, it would appear that the government's motion is disclosed as only another roadblock camouflaged as action in the fight against inflation, that it is only another exercise in the gentle art of pottie-sitting.

I move:

That the motion be amended by adding thereto, immediately after the word "appointed", the following:

"to inquire into the causes, processes and consequences of inflation and"