

justice without controls has been very, very rough for a great many people in this period of rapid inflation that has been continuing.

Secondly, we have to recognize that a program of controls to bring some order to the present situation and to reduce the inequities that exist today will involve some injustice which will have to be accepted if the rate of inflation is to be brought under control. The fact that there is inevitably a good deal of rough justice involved for the Canadian people, particularly for the working people of this country—especially in a period of rapid inflation such as we have had—is one very important reason why the period of controls should not be too long. It is one thing to ask Canadians to accept controls for a year and a half; it is a very different thing to ask Canadians to accept a program of controls designed to last for 3¼ years, or perhaps a good deal longer since they can be extended on the basis of a three-day debate in this House, which of course amounts to nothing in the way of safeguards with a majority government.

Further, it is one thing to use controls on prices and incomes for, say, a period of a year and a half to try to restore order in the economy, to break the inflationary psychology, and to give time to put in place other more flexible tools to fight inflation on a longer term. But it is a very different thing to resort to controls on prices and incomes for virtually an open-ended period of time with a view to gradually bringing down the rate of inflation.

I say to you, Madam Speaker, very solemnly that there is no reason to believe that the concept of relatively long-term controls will work. There is every reason to believe, based on experience in our own country and elsewhere, that they will not work, that after a year and a half or so the controls will become more and more artificial and more and more out of touch with the underlying economic reality in the country. In addition, there is every reason to believe that controls in place for years—which is what the government is proposing—will result in more and more centralization of economic power here in Ottawa. I wonder why some of my friends in the New Democratic Party are not tempted to support the program, because what is likely to happen is that the program will result in a highly centralized economy with the main economic decisions being made by a few officials and a few ministers here in Ottawa. If such a program is in place for three to four years or longer, the trend toward centralization might well become irreversible. I am utterly opposed to controls for the period envisaged thus far by the government, and I hope it can be persuaded to adopt a more sensible period.

As I say, this longer term concept will not work. I am not prepared to delegate all that power to any government for an undetermined period of time; and this really is an undetermined period of time because the period can be extended beyond the 3¼ years very easily by the government. Furthermore, I say that this government, with its record, is not entitled to trust or to any benefit of the doubt in respect of its purpose.

● (1250)

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Anti-Inflation Program

Mr. Stanfield: There are many faults in the program as introduced. Let us consider the freezing of dividends. Why is there a freeze of dividends? That is obviously unfair to a good many people.

An hon. Member: What about the corporate citizen?

Mr. Stanfield: My friend asks about the corporate citizen. This is not going to worry the corporate citizen much because he does not depend on dividends. It is obviously very unfair to many retired people who need the income from the few shares they own.

An hon. Member: One-quarter of 1 per cent?

Mr. Stanfield: Apparently, it does not matter that this hurts only a few people or a small proportion. Apparently, we should kick them around as much as we like. I am not attacking my hon. friend; I am asking the minister what is the sense of doing this. Why not provide some guidelines in respect of dividends that are relatively fair and compatible with the rest of the program? Why should we have a freeze on dividends? Is this sort of gimmick an attempt to persuade the workingman that the government is trying to kick other people around? I think the actual freezing of dividends, as opposed to the establishment of sensible guidelines in relation to dividends, is stupid for umpteen reasons.

I do not want to carry on for too long, and I cannot; but I must say that I am by no means ready to continue to support the government's anti-inflation program. I do not demand perfection, as I have indicated, least of all from this government. I recognize, also, the urgency for definitive action being taken to curb the rampant inflation existing in this country today which is doing so much injustice to so many people. But I will not support the bringing into operation of a bad program. By a "bad program" in these circumstances, I mean one which is not only imperfect—and I expect any program to be somewhat imperfect—but one which probably would not work and would create new dangers and new problems. Due to its length, particularly, and other aspects that have been mentioned, this program probably will not work and probably will create new dangers.

I say this parliament ought not to be asked to grant to the government the extraordinary powers it is seeking for virtually an undefined or very ill-defined period of time, subject only to a relatively ineffectual period of review involving a debate in the House for three days. Such a review and debate would be virtually meaningless when the government has a clear majority in parliament.

In my view, the bill should be amended so it will terminate in 18 months. Just before the expiry of the 18 months, if the government felt it could make a case for the extension of the program, it could bring in a bill for that purpose. I want to say frankly to my friends in the NDP that I cannot support their motion. Without taking too much time, let me say that I find the NDP position on controls and in the fight against inflation rather confusing, puzzling and contradictory, depending on which part of the country you happen to be in at the time.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!