

noon for the first time. I expressed my concern the first time the Prime Minister and the Minister of Finance described this program to me and the leaders of the other opposition parties. I have expressed these concerns many times since. On the afternoon of November 14, if I may be forgiven for quoting myself—even if I am not forgiven I shall do so—I said:

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—

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.

Later I said:

How could we willingly grant such powers for so long to any government, let alone a government which has such a record for opportunism as this one?

When the Minister of Finance spoke later in the debate on the afternoon of Friday, November 14, he did not even acknowledge he had heard what I had said in this regard. He did not even acknowledge it, let alone respond to it in any way. We stated our position clearly and unequivocally in the House committee. I stated it again in a letter to the Prime Minister last week, and we are stating it again in the House today.

The belated response which the government finally brings in is embodied in the review amendment put forward by the Minister of Finance which is reflected in motion No. 5. My first encounter with the proposal for a review of this kind, as a government initiative, was when I read it in the Prime Minister's reply to my letter of November 20. I wrote back to the Prime Minister to say that the government's proposal did not meet our concerns. At the finance committee meeting of November 3, the Minister of Finance suggested that my party might wish to put forward an amendment along the lines of the one which now stands in his name. At that point we realized the government was up to its old game of speaking out of both sides of its mouth at the same time. Only minutes before the minister made his remarks in committee about the possibility of a review amendment, he attempted to defend in logic the need for the program to run over three years. This is what he said:

● (1620)

The program is posited on the guideline proposals of looking at three successive years, by which one would hope that the basic protection factor could in effect go from 8 per cent to 6 per cent to 4 per cent, so we are talking in a three-year time framework and therefore it seemed to have some logic.

In the next breath, having said that, he outlined how we in the official opposition "might consider formulating an amendment" if what was desired was "a parliamentary occasion to discuss the issue." We have been seeking something beyond a future occasion to discuss the issue, and the minister knows that. I submit that all he engaged in on November 3, and all that the government has engaged in since, on this matter can be summed up under the general headings of flank-covering and bone-throwing.

The minister says that the government, in its own logic, is convinced of the necessity of a program running at least

Anti-Inflation Act

3¼ years. Again I remind the House that we are not being asked to vote on a program. When the bill is passed and becomes law, the government can change the program beyond any recognition without any reference back to parliament. The minister, having said that he was convinced that they needed the program for 3¼ years, then said, in effect, that if we wanted to discuss it after the passage of 18 months the government could entertain provision for that.

It is a sham for the minister to suggest that this represents any kind of meaningful review, with no outside witnesses, no representations, no means of forcing information from the government, none of the other procedural arrangements involved in the procedure of a bill passing through the House, and no possibility of amending the act. The only question before the House on that review procedure is a yes or no. The only question for the House, and for a very limited time, is whether the government's program should end as defined, if it were defined in the present bill, or should terminate earlier. Such a debate, when the government sits in majority, would represent nothing more than a progress report.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Stanfield: That is the bone he throws on a "take it or leave it" basis. Bear in mind that once the government has passed the review period which is under this proposal—the question of review could be raised only at some time, I think, between March 31, 1977, and July 1, 1977—there is no further provision for any parliamentary review. The government could do anything it liked with the program, without any possibility of a discussion of what it is doing unless the government graciously provided it, or unless we have the sort of discussion we are able to have on opposition days in parliament.

When it became clear to the minister that the official opposition was not of a mind to grab the bone in committee, he retrieved it himself as something to throw our way again at report stage. He said he would present "an amendment with regard to an interim debate on the measure". That is what he has done now.

Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton): There is no meat on this bone now.

Mr. Stanfield: No meat, no bone, so far as I am concerned. I refer the House to two other statements made by the minister during consideration by the finance committee. These serve to illustrate the tangled web which the government has woven regarding the duration of the Anti-Inflation Act. On October 13, the minister was asked to comment on the Prime Minister's speculation that the period might be shorter. He donned his optimistic cap and said:

Really, if after a period of 18 months, and I would be happy to see such a result, there was a significant reduction in the rate of inflation in Canada, it is quite possible that we could end these inflationary controls, in view of such an improvement in the economic situation.

They might end the program they have launched in recent days, but that is a very different thing from surrendering powers which, I venture to suggest, they would reserve unto themselves and exercise from time to time in any manner that suited their purposes. On November 20,