

*Anti-Inflation Act*

experience on national commissions involved with controls. Perhaps they were anticipating that result when they left open the third chair on the tribunal.

If this is a program put together at the last minute, it involves two very real dangers. First, we have before us legislation with a very substantial capacity for abuse. This legislation could cause serious harm to individuals, and serious distortions in the economy. It may not have been well thought out. It is one thing to have arbitrary powers that were deliberately planned; it is another to have arbitrary powers that are open ended simply because you have not taken time to stake them out or nail them down.

If this program is jerry-built, thrown together at the last minute, and there is evidence to suggest it has been, we are in a situation where the government is asking the parliament of Canada to approve powers that are open ended, not because they need be, but because the Government of Canada did not take time to close them or tighten them up. It would be absolutely irresponsible of this parliament to allow that kind of proposal, if that was its genesis, to move unscathed and unamended through committee and be approved at final reading in this House.

The second danger with proceeding flippantly and without seriousness with the measures announced on commandeered national television the other night is that the government cannot again fail in dealing with inflation. The problems of inflation in Canada, and the effects it has on individual citizens from one coast to another, are simply too severe to go unresolved and unattended.

If the government is engaged in another public relations gesture and it fails, it will undermine not only its capacity to mobilize Canadians to try to deal with problems, it will undermine the capacities of parliament and governments to come. That can be particularly serious in a country like Canada.

I, like many of us, have watched with considerable interest, and one could use other language, the progress of the Prime Minister in office. I think the reality is clear to all of us that during his time of leadership in the country he has not given much priority to economic problems. We know he came to federal politics for reasons that were, by and large unrelated to economic problems. They were legitimate reasons in their own right. They had to do with the nature of participation in the federal public service and federal government by Francophones. That was an important motive to bring a man or men to Ottawa. There may be disagreement from time to time about other programs which that motive has led him to introduce, but I think it is recognized that that is why he came. I think it is also recognized that because of his preoccupation with that question other important questions, notably economic, have suffered from inattention.

● (2120)

We have not seen under his guidance a national economic policy designed to integrate the various components which together make up the economic fabric of Canada. This fault was compounded by the fact that until not long ago economic matters were presided over by a minister of finance whose only interest in his portfolio was to survive it. He was concerned that if he did his job as minister of finance it would prevent him having any chance of doing a

[Mr. Clark (Rocky Mountain).]

job as prime minister. And he preferred his ambition to his responsibilities. Whatever the causes, we were left for seven years without any co-ordinated economic policy.

I have to say to the present Minister of Finance that there was some hope when he was given the portfolio. Few of us on this side of the House, least of all myself, coming as I do from Alberta, have much reason to be endeared to the Minister of Finance. But all of us, I think, have recognized his ability. All of us have recognized his strength. I, personally, was impressed by the report that he apparently wished to leave politics and had to be persuaded to come back to take on his present portfolio.

**The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Morin):** Order. I wonder whether the hon. member is not straying from the subject. Bill C-73 is an act to provide for the restraint of profit margins, prices, dividends and compensation in Canada. Perhaps the hon. member would direct his remarks to the bill.

**Mr. Clark (Rocky Mountain):** Thank you, Madam Speaker. I apologize if I appeared to be straying. I was seeking to indicate that we are dealing here with a piece of legislation which has a particular origin, and that it is important for us to understand why it has been brought forward and what its consequences might be. The point I was making is this: there has never been throughout the history of the government a commitment on economic issues such as would lead naturally to the kind of program we are considering here tonight. If any praise of the present Minister of Finance will result in my being accused of straying from the topic, I shall not praise him again. But I still say there had been some hope that his ability and his acknowledged strength would bring a change, and would at least pull together the strands of national economic policy. However, we must say, further in that regard that his performance in the debate on this bill has been disappointing because it confirmed some of our worst suspicions about him.

**Mr. Macdonald (Rosedale):** I feel a lot better now!

**Mr. Clark (Rocky Mountain):** No program of controls will work in the absence of some degree of consensus, and it is certainly the responsibility of the Minister of Finance to seek such a consensus. Instead, the minister in his remarks engaged in personal attacks on the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Stanfield), the leader of the New Democratic Party (Mr. Broadbent), and others in the House. Once again he revealed his penchant to divide. He is, unfortunately, a divider by nature. But, by duty, he must be a unifier, and what causes concern to those of us who want to see this program work is the early evidence that his nature is appearing to triumph over this duty.

**Mr. Macdonald (Rosedale):** Come on, you are laughing yourself, Joe!

**Mr. Clark (Rocky Mountain):** No, it is not a laughing matter. It is a serious matter, because legislation of this kind can only become effective if there is a feeling of respect among the various elements in the economy, and it is a primary responsibility of the Minister of Finance to seek to achieve such a consensus and not to attack and divide, as the minister did in his opening address.