

Anti-Inflation Act

to the Prime Minister it seems that he is just another neglected nobody on society's back benches?

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Baldwin: I confess that there is a certain enjoyable element in reminding the Prime Minister of his earlier statements, but let me hasten to assure the House that we are very serious about the point being made. We have a bill before us of unprecedented dimensions in peacetime. I agree with the Minister of Finance that it will be generally perceived to be frightening. If there is also a general perception that the Prime Minister has pressed the button and then gone off to languish by the pool, we are all headed for a morass of confrontation through our society. I would like to raise what I consider to be some fairly important and contentious aspects of the legislation which in our view will have to be taken into account and corrective measures applied before the bill is finally passed through all stages by this House.

To begin with, I am simply appalled at the effrontery of the Prime Minister, the Minister of Finance and the government in asking this House to grant to it the unique, extraordinary and terrifying powers, to use the minister's words, which are asked for for an open-ended period of time. I would protest if my own party asked for those powers. Despite the respect and admiration I have for my leader, I would oppose him if he introduced legislation of this kind, although I could never see him seeking to do so in these terms. Let me put it simply in this way: the legislation as it presently stands would permit this government, some time in the late fall of 1978, to put forward and ram through motions which could extend for another two, three or four years the kind of legislation which we are considering. I am not prepared to entrust this power to any group of people, and certainly not to this government.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Baldwin: I repeat, that as far as we are concerned, this aspect is totally unacceptable and simple will not wash. We will be proposing an amendment at the appropriate stages of committee and later to deal with this, and in our view failure to provide something to cover this problem, so that we will not be in a position where we sit here until 1978 waiting for the government to decide whether to extend the legislation, is unacceptable. We will propose an amendment which will provide that at an earlier date during the life of this legislation, this House will have, as it must, the right to decide whether under the circumstances which then exist the extension of the legislation is warranted.

Then there is the idiotic procedure outlined governing the lines of communication and appeal between the anti-inflation tribunal, the administrator, the deputy administrators, the appeal tribunal, the Federal Court and the cabinet. This is a sort of hydra-headed monster, a form of legislative Rube Goldberg caricature which is going to cause great trouble for the people in labour unions, business and all elements of our society affected by this legislation.

Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton): Even the marketing boards.

[Mr. Baldwin.]

Mr. Baldwin: There is the question of the extent and nature of the penalties, the way they are imposed and the judicial power given to the administrator to act as investigator, Crown prosecutor, judge, jury and executioner in connection with the administration of the legislation. There will be the question of detailing the special circumstances which will permit decisions to be made in order to provide complete equity. However, I will leave these for others to deal with. I would say, however, that it should come as no surprise to members of this House when I express my anxiety as to the extraordinary extent to which the House is being asked to place in the hands of this government unique and tremendous authority to deal, in the most intimate detail, with the property and the social and economic well-being of the people of Canada.

The whole course of the history of this government, of the Trudeau administration and its immediate predecessor, has been marked by the extent to which they have reached out year by year, session by session, act by act, and stolen from the people the right to order their own affairs, and vested that right in the bureaucrats of Ottawa; and in doing so then have refused to provide adequate safeguards to prevent the abuse of that power.

I will not take the time of the House at this stage to go through the bill clause by clause and to point out the extent of and the places where vast, authoritarian fiats have been granted to the various tribunals, the administrators and the cabinet. It is complete, unrestricted and unabridged authoritarianism granted to a government composed mainly of bureaucrats blooded by experience in high positions of one kind or another before coming into politics, and whose appetites have been whetted by their period in office as members of the cabinet.

● (1420)

Mr. Speaker, this party and this House would be delinquent in its duty if it failed to provide, by way of affirmation or negative resolution, that parliament should retain some measure of control and supervision. It ought not to be asked, nor must it agree, to yield on behalf of the people its duty to examine from time to time the salient aspects of what is being done under authority granted by the legislation. It is our intention to press to see that apt words to this effect are included in the bill.

I see my friend, the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles), is in the House. I think only he and the right hon. member for Prince Albert (Mr. Diefenbaker) were in the House at the time it was found necessary to wrench from another Liberal administration the powers it had taken during the last world war and retained year after year, long after the crisis had evaporated. I think that is a lesson we cannot forget.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Same old gang.

Mr. Baldwin: I would not say it is the same old gang; I would say they are a lot worse, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. LeBlanc (Westmorland-Kent): Same old jokes.

Mr. Baldwin: It would have been the intention of this party, if it had been placed in that position following the last election, to have dealt with the problems of inflation