

Anti-Inflation Act

find a way through the jungle which the administration itself has created.

The clichés of the Minister of Finance will no longer convince anyone. Too many promises have been broken. Too many commitments have been abandoned. The government will, no doubt, go into the next election campaign telling the people that it has removed controls, secured the co-operation of the big unions and of the business sector, and promising a lower rate of inflation—6 per cent at the end of this year and 4 per cent, eventually, in line with the real growth of the economy. But attempts along these lines will meet with no success.

The government has failed to arrange for the co-operation of a tripartite tribunal as is so necessary at this point in time. It is true on occasions there have been conferences in back rooms between representatives of the government and their friends among the business giants. But that is not enough. A totally integrated Canadian corporation today is a company which has a consultant sitting on one of the regulatory boards and agencies which the government has created. Similarly, a well integrated company needs to have some of its directors sitting on the boards of banks as well.

The government calls in its friends and talks about labour, which is supposed to be responsible for the horrendous crisis through which we are passing, and then it calls in some labour leaders to take part in discussions, although I must say they did not play the game as well as the business sector did. Nevertheless, they call in labour as well, and sit together in a back room and talk about the business sector being responsible for the dilemma in which we find ourselves. The fact is, in the whole period during which the anti-inflation program has been in force there has been no attempt to bring the parties together in one room to discuss, for example, the formulation of an industrial and social strategy. No attempt has been made to work out what share each should have of the pie—to divide it fairly, giving government sufficient money to operate, giving industry enough money to meet the horrendous cost of upgrading its technology and modernizing its plant, and giving labour, too, its fair share in the real growth of the economy.

The minister may travel across the country telling Canadians that next year real growth will amount to 5.5 per cent. The fact is, though, that all the evidence, all the traditional sources of information, indicate it will be less than that, possibly 3 per cent. I do not wish to be a prophet of gloom but there is no indication, either, that we are likely to receive anything less than a 9 per cent inflation rate at the end of this year.

The Minister of Labour (Mr. Munro) has told us, of course, that according to some indicators, Canada, next to Japan and the United States, has the best potential for showing a measure of economic recovery. Well, Mr. Speaker, I believe we always have the best potential to be number one in economic terms in the industrial community, but we have not yet learned to seize the opportunity presented to us by the richness of our resources and the skills of our workers. We have not yet been prepared to make the commitment required to muster these resources by giving the necessary incentives to industry and to the workers to dig us out of this predicament, which has

[Mr. Oberle.]

brought with it a measure of shame to our country because we have slipped from number three position in the world to number ten, next to such countries as Luxembourg.

The measure we are discussing today is a housekeeping bill which attempts to plug loopholes so far left open. It is an attempt to ensure that when controls are lifted the unions will not demand that their members be placed in the position they might have expected had controls not been imposed. The government is trying to stick a finger into a leaking dam. The bill is a nothing bill unless ministers are prepared to tell us plainly what plans they propose to adopt as the country enters the post-controls period. We fear that, in the absence of any attempt to arrange a tripartite agreement, the country is in for some rough months, if not rough years. Canadians are beginning to realize it will take a very fundamental change, namely, a change of government, before we can expect a turn around.

[Translation]

Hon. Marcel Lambert (Edmonton West): Mr. Speaker, I do not know where the Minister of Finance is at this time but I would like to point out that being the sponsor of this bill he finds himself in a rather unpleasant situation since he was just recently appointed Minister of Finance and must consequently accept to steer this bill of amendments through the House although the faults therein were inherited from his predecessor.

The press release of December 19 when this bill was introduced said that the government intended to bring in amendments to the Anti-Inflation Act to secure a more orderly withdrawal of wage and price controls as announced by the hon. Jean Chrétien. There was mention of amendments which had been introduced last summer under Bill C-59 but which were abandoned before the last session of parliament was prorogated. We are now told that these amendments introduced under Bill C-16 provide for the first time that there will be some orderly transition between the control period and the lifting of certain controls on April 14.

But a thorough examination of Bill C-16 does not indicate any mention of the date of April 14. This would be done by order in council.

I wonder whether electoral reasons did not determine the date of April 14 since the control legislation will no longer be in effect on December 31. December 31 is too far in the future for the election requirements and demands of the government before the end of the year. It is anticipated that it will be for the month of June or the fall—there is uncertainty as to whether there will be an election, so they say that there is going to be a transition period starting on April 14, but what kind of transition? This is not indicated at all in the bill. The withdrawal of this mandatory program is intended for a public which is not too well informed. We are grandfathers to all those people and in our benevolent attention for the well-being of the Canadian public we are going to start withdrawing those controls. There is nothing in this legislation for that, except that the legislation will continue to be in effect until December 31 next.