

*Anti-Inflation Act*

● (1520)

I think this government will have to look very seriously at whether or not it is able to convince the Canadian people that the program brought forward, even if it has a chance to work, can work in the light of what has gone on before. In the remaining minutes I have today I wish to present one or two views which I hope may be beneficial in the sense that they are positive and, hopefully, will be considered by the government.

Price and income controls, as the government has presented them to the House, represent a stopgap measure by which the government can help dampen the inflation psychology and expectations and thus get us straightened around in respect of what we think we can take from the economy. I think at some time or other we have all said that we will try to get out of the economy as much as we can, in order to protect ourselves. Frankly, some of us have been more successful than others. I shall have more to say about this later.

I believe the government will have to reverse its general attitude toward government. I believe this government going back to 1965—as well as the provincial governments—has accepted the philosophy that government can actually create happiness, and if governments spend more and more tax money, then all will benefit and have a better quality of life. I seriously question whether it is the role of government to go beyond the economic climate. It should help those who need help directly, but after that point is reached I seriously question whether we should get into all the hand-out gimmicks this government and others used in the last year, for instance.

For example, ten years ago various levels of government were taking approximately 29 per cent of our gross national product, call it redistribution of wealth or whatever you like. Today we are approaching the 40 per cent figure at all levels of government. I say to the government that this has to be counterproductive, in the sense that we have taken so much out of private hands that the private individual seriously questions whether he is ahead after taxes and is getting a benefit for the work he has done or the investment he has made over and above the hand-outs which many people in society seem to be getting.

I think this is the fundamental point the government in its long-term philosophy will have to look at very seriously. I suggest that the proposal requires a complete redirection in attitude and policy. As a follow-up of that, I believe the government must practice restraint. We are often accused of repeating this and not being specific enough. Therefore, I propose that the government should place a freeze on its expenditures and a freeze on its hiring practices. I say this because that 40 per cent figure, to my mind, must be reduced.

In years past, this House passed various bills in the hope that they would help many Canadians. I refer specifically to the unemployment insurance bill. Many of the principles which are found in the white paper in respect of that bill are based on premises which might have existed at one time. One of those principles was that many Canadians avoided unemployment insurance; even if it was the last thing they could do, they would not go on unemployment insurance. Today, I think that attitude has changed in respect of a certain proportion of our population. Conse-

[Mr. Epp.]

quently, we are spending twice as many dollars on unemployment insurance than is the case in the United States. I wonder when this will stop.

Yesterday a colleague of mine referred to Information Canada. That has been mentioned a number of times. There is also the whole question of a guaranteed annual income. In Manitoba, we have an experiment called a mini-income, whereby an attempt is being made to find out whether people would continue to work if there were a guaranteed annual income. I might say that the results are such that many of us seriously question whether a sufficient number of people in Canada say to themselves, "Granted, we are getting less than we would if we were working, but it is not a bad way of living if you do not have to work." The Canadian worker today is simply saying that he is becoming tired of supporting people who think being on the public dole is honourable or might even be their right.

Then there is the matter of government buildings. Everywhere in Ottawa one sees one project after another which bears a beautiful white and green sign stating that the project is under the supervision of the Department of Public Works. I wish to mention what happened in Winnipeg. The Minister of Manpower and Immigration (Mr. Andras)—I am glad he is in the House today—might take note of this. We had office space in Winnipeg and it was good space. Recently, however, in connection with the Winnipeg convention centre a new development has taken place right beside it, called Lakeshore Development, which is the most expensive real estate footage in Winnipeg. What happened? The first to move into this building were, of course, government departments. Governments seem to be in the forefront in getting the very best at the highest cost, and this has a psychological impact, I believe, on the Canadian people.

I think, also, the government should move toward a balanced budget. I believe our deficit is too high. The cost of servicing the national debt has become a major part of our yearly expenditures. I believe the government should look at that matter. Then there is the matter of the Foreign Investment Review Act. Representatives of the Quebec government are in West Germany these days trying to attract more investment funds for the province of Quebec. They are running into difficulty. The investors say that they want to invest in Canada but that the implementation of the Foreign Investment Review Act is starting to dry up some of the money supply.

I could go on to talk about consultants and the number of massive projects we have under construction in respect of the Olympics, James Bay, Churchill, and so on, and ask to what extent these massive projects are a strain on our money supply. All these projects are being carried out at the same time. To what extent have they contributed to inflation and the higher costs of construction during this period? Another point we could raise concerns the metric system. At this point in time, should there be a priority for spending in respect of metric conversion, or would it be advisable for us to defer metrification and lock our approach in with that of the United States so that the expenditures could be deferred for three or five years, as the case may be?