

*Anti-Inflation Act*

● (1530)

What is required is a careful analysis of the situation at the end of 18 months, so we can decide where we have gone. Obviously, there will be some errors made. It is a tough program. I am quite honest when I say that had the Conservatives won the election in 1974 and introduced our system of controls—the 90-day freeze and then a short period of controls—there would have been mistakes; there would have been some difficulties. After all, we could not get into the blessed mess that we are in without it costing us something to get out. If the situation were so simple that there would be no problems, then the art of government would be extraordinarily easy. But that is not the case.

This House will ultimately, undoubtedly, pass this bill in principle so that it can go to committee to be examined in detail. We will then see the proof of the pudding. The bill is being sent to the finance committee, but I can assure the House, Mr. Speaker, that it will not be just government officials who will speak to the committee—not likely. The minister has already confused everybody, including himself, and has he done so just to confuse the committee?

I am sure that organized groups, farmers, manufacturers, many walks of life both organized and unorganized, will want to let the committee know what they think about these controls and some of the dangers. I hope their criticisms will be constructive. But there will be criticism and it will take some time to express. I hope we can arrange our work in this way so that those people who are vitally concerned with this problem of administration, on both sides of the House, will be able to devote appropriate time to the matter; that we will not have piled on to the committee more and more work so there is pressure to work morning, afternoon and night, week in and week out, so as to hide and obscure, as is often the case when government tries to ram through a measure.

Having said that, Mr. Speaker, I hope that in his reply the Minister of Finance will be forthcoming in regard to some of the questions posed by my colleagues and others in the House. We say that inflation is so bad that we must have the most straightforward honesty both from the Minister of Finance and from the Prime Minister. And last but not least, we must have an honest exposé of what went on by the hon. member for Ottawa-Carleton when he was acting in his capacity as minister of finance.

**Miss Flora MacDonald (Kingston and the Islands):** Mr. Speaker, may I say at the outset that I am relieved that the government has at last faced up to its responsibility to do something about inflation. This certainly is not the occasion to reiterate the arguments that we have been putting forward for so long calling for positive, strong action. Suffice it to say that we welcome this declaration of intent.

Our hopes were raised many months ago when the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) said, and as he has repeated so often, that he would wrestle inflation to the ground. Well, that announced that the match would be held, but unfortunately the date was never set. At last the government has entered the ring. That is good and necessary. But I cannot help wondering, Mr. Speaker, if you will allow me to prolong the analogy, just what the government has been doing during the training period, this long, long training

[Mr. Lambert (Edmonton West).]

period. Obviously, the government was not doing road-work. The provinces, the unions, business—none was brought in on the preparations.

Nor do we have any evidence that the government was even doing exercises at home in preparation for the fight. Indeed, the entire plan so far revealed has every mark of being put together in considerable haste. What we have before us is obviously the result of the burning of midnight oil for a period of about three weeks or so, probably since about September 26 when the new Minister of Finance (Mr. Macdonald) moved into Place Bell Canada. Could it be that when he moved in he could find no contingency planning, no strategy for the forthcoming match, not even a few notes on a blotter?

Of course, that raises the still unresolved question—just referred to—of why one of the seconds left the team before the bell rang. We still have not had a proper account of what lies behind that change in the line-up. In my view, an explanation is owing, and badly owing; but that is another matter which I hope will be answered by the former minister of finance.

We certainly had no idea that the fight was coming soon, in view of the government's diet during the training period—salary increases, complement increases, a quarter of a million dollars worth of smoked salmon and champagne to open Mirabel, regret than \$400 million will not be spent at Pickering, with the suggestion that other places will be found to spend the money, and an absolutely shattering deficit as well. No, Mr. Speaker, there was no dieting, no trimming of fat, in preparation for the wrestling match. I suppose the idea was to go in heavy, to gain as much weight advantage as possible.

Why, then, did the government also feed its opponent? Why make the contest more difficult? Why increase, for instance, so dramatically the price of fuel? Did we really have to add to rising costs everywhere for home buyers and businessmen by putting up the interest rate so high? Did we have to go so deeply into the money markets that private borrowers are finding the pot dry or the price far too high?

However, that is past: we now come to the day of the big event and the bell has rung for the first round. And what a fight it is going to be. It will be a long one, Mr. Speaker, a very long one. There is no expectation of an early decision. There is no indication or suggestion that once inflation is on the mat it can be pinned quickly so we can then turn our attention to other matters. We have been told by the Prime Minister that it is going to be more than three years before the referee is asked if the fight should continue, and that worries me very much.

I worry that the powers granted will be kept by government. I worry that what is being done to meet an emergency may turn into a way of life, a continuing condition of being Canadian. I worry that the free forces that have helped us reach the prosperity we have will be forever checked as a result of needing regulation at this particular time. I plead with the government to give us some concrete and meaningful assurance that parliament will be able to review these powers, not three years hence but six months hence or at least a year hence. We had problems enough with one War Measures Act; let us not make this a parallel in the "war against inflation measures act."