

Anti-Inflation Act

control program was brought in. It is sophistry to say that the AIB program will result in redistribution of income. To redistribute income effectively one must tax money derived, not from wages and salaries but from professional fees, dividends and other sources and distribute these funds through a tax credit system to those at the bottom.

To some extent, my party can take satisfaction in the bill before us. We have throughout this period stressed the need for some changes at least in what we believe to be a grossly unfair program, and changes are now being made in certain areas. On two occasions my leader has suggested to the government an appeal procedure that would be the very minimum required to make the program more acceptable. The hon. member for Nanaimo-Cowichan-The Islands (Mr. Douglas) has also spoken on this subject.

● (1630)

I should also make it clear that the New Democratic Party is not opposed in principle to the restraint program. This is something that has to be repeated, since there has been a tendency to misquote the party or to misinterpret the purpose of our objection to this particular program. We think that the restraint program can in fact be very useful, if it is fair. This is really the point we have been trying to make in the suggestions we have put forward and in calling for improved appeal procedures.

One of the sad things about this entire debate is the way the government is placing the trade union movement in a position from which it cannot co-operate in any honourable way. There is a tendency on the part of the government to forget that in the past the trade union movement has indicated its willingness to go along with restraint programs if those programs applied equally to all elements in society. I recall the Christmas before last a brilliant speech made by the president of the Canadian Labour Congress. I should like to read it into the record—I think I have sufficient time to do so—because it is worth recalling that the trade union movement has spoken up repeatedly on the need for social cohesion and co-operation. Only because the government has refused to recognize the gross unfairness of its present program has labour been put in a strong adversary position against the program itself and against the government of this country in the sense of being willing to co-operate with the government. This is the New Year's message from Joe Morris, president of the Canadian Labour Congress:

Looking back at the year that is about to end, I doubt that many of us will remember it with particular fondness. It was a year that began with an artificially created worldwide shortage of energy that threatened to bring about widespread hardship and increased unemployment.

It was a year during which the real earnings of Canadian working people steadily declined while the profits of many corporations reached record heights. A year where the cost of food climbed to levels where many people in the lower and fixed income brackets found it difficult to feed themselves and their families. A year where unemployment continued to be rampant. And a year where the cost of housing rose sky-high and made it impossible for the majority of young Canadian families to afford a home.

Looking ahead, there is little to be optimistic about for 1975. Not enough is being done to combat the many problems that beset us.

The challenge to the labour movement in the year ahead is to drive hard to protect men and women workers against the blight of inflation, to stop the merciless attack on the purchasing power of their hard-earned wages and salaries.

[Mr. Saltsman.]

Apart from the hardship inflation poses to wage and salary earners, pensioners and, in general, all middle and lower income groups, there is a definite danger that the problem may, if it is not curbed soon, destroy the very social fabric of our country and other countries almost as radically and surely as violent revolution.

On the international level, the danger is that countries will take steps to protect themselves without any consideration for the damage such isolationist steps may cause other countries and the world as a whole.

In Canada, individual groups may tend to look out for their own interests alone in order to protect themselves from the dangers of inflation, often unconcerned or simply unaware that by doing so they are hurting other groups, thereby ultimately hurting themselves.

Such a return to the law of the jungle may become so divisive and destructive to the social conscience of individuals and groups alike that the things Canadians now share in common may deteriorate and, with them, the orderly and generally peaceful manner in which we live and conduct our affairs.

With them may also go the moral obligation, the understanding and the compassion which our society, if it values itself, must have for all its disadvantaged people.

The working people through their organizations must guard against becoming just another selfish interest. While continuing the struggle for a fair return for their labour, they must also continue to be concerned with social and economic justice for all those who are defenceless and have no organization to speak for them. Some we can help to become organized and gain the strength that comes from joining support by pressing for improved social legislation, by drawing the public's attention to their problems, or simply by extending to them the warmth of human friendship and understanding.

As the most powerful social movement in this country, the trade union movement has always been concerned with the total human condition. Ours is a movement of compassion. In the truest sense of the word we are our brothers' keepers.

During this season of good will, let us rededicate ourselves to these ideals. Let us pledge all our resources to help make Canada and the world a better place to live in, a place where justice, freedom and material necessities of life are not reserved to the fortunate few, but to all.

That is hardly the speech of a man who wanted to fight his government and did not wish to co-operate in making progress. The problem is that the government never gave the trade union movement a real chance; it never really understood what they were trying to do. The government has been unable to persuade the trade unions that its program is anything more than restraint of their wages but nobody else's. Until some assurances are given, not only in words, but until some evidence comes from the government side that in fact the government has effective ways of asking all Canadians to share equally in restraint, it is just too much for the government to expect the co-operation of this most important segment of our economy.

Mr. Robert C. Coates (Cumberland-Colchester North): Mr. Speaker, I can think of no more significant day than this to speak on this legislation, the amendments thereto and on all aspects of the program as it affects the citizens of this nation. We from Atlantic Canada have indicated our very real concerns over what this legislation might do to us. One of the first major decisions made by the Anti-Inflation Board was an indication to us that the concerns we had were justified, in that the board brought down its ruling in the Irving wage settlement case. In addition, it imposed a fine of \$125,000, something that could not have been anticipated by anybody when the legislation was brought in, and which should not have been anticipated by anyone from the Atlantic provinces in view of the fact that it is a well known, cardinal rule of economics in this nation