

Anti-Inflation Act

It is important to note that the government is answerable and the board is not. The board is set up; it does not fall; it does not get defeated. You cannot even filibuster or talk against the board. But the government is here and it can fall. At the moment it looks unlikely, but it could fall. Governments have fallen and found themselves obliged to secure a mandate from the people. It is the right of the public to judge the conduct of the government, not of Jean-Luc Pepin or Mrs. Plumptre. That is the greatest danger in the incomes policy. We agree that an incomes policy is important, and we do not oppose it in principle. We oppose the kind of legislation before us and we oppose the type of amendments which are being tacked on to it because we are not dealing here with the type of legislation which is capable of being improved by such amendments. We oppose it because what we are looking at is a technical arrangement. The government looks upon this legislation as relating to a technical issue. It uses devices such as a 10 per cent cut-off. It does not care what happens to the other things, or if it does care, it says; "We really haven't got the mechanism for handling them."

● (1550)

In fact, income distribution is a political question. That is what politics is all about. That is what we are fighting for in this party. We are fighting for people at the lower end of the scale. How can members opposite say we have solved our political or our technical questions when one-fifth of our people are getting 5 per cent or 6 per cent of the income and another fifth is getting 42 per cent of the income? That is what politics is all about—resolving these differences in income distribution by the arguments we present to the people and then by the degree of support they accord to various political parties. It would be a grave mistake and a terrible disservice to the country and to this institution to turn decision-making over to a body with narrow terms of reference and without any mandate from the Canadian public.

Mr. Gordon Towers (Red Deer): In speaking to this motion, I think a word from this side of the House, in clarification, would be in order. I have never seen such a twisty, writhing individual as I do at this moment in the hon. member for Waterloo-Cambridge (Mr. Saltsman). I think he would be well advised to stay with his crossword puzzles because he cannot even seem to listen to an intelligent speech and comprehend what was said.

The hon. member for York-Simcoe (Mr. Stevens) expressed in simple terms exactly what we on this side wanted in this amendment, which was that an outside body should not have wadding placed in its mouth and be limited in what it has to say. It is of fundamental importance to the Canadian people that an outside voice should portray to them exactly what is happening in the field of government spending. The hon. member for Waterloo-Cambridge expresses the opinion that maybe politics does enter into it. Certainly, when the Canadian people hear a message from the House of Commons they do on occasion have misgivings about what is being said in case this political aspect is entering into what is being said. Therefore, if the government believes this review board is to serve a useful purpose in the Canadian scheme of things, it

[Mr. Saltsman.]

should surely be subject to the board's observations and criticisms in the same way as the rest of the economy.

Maybe members of the NDP are prepared to elevate government above all the other sectors, business and so on, but I certainly am not of that opinion and I am sure my colleagues do not agree with it, because of the fundamental importance of the proposition that government should serve the people. Never should we allow government to be a dictator to the ordinary people. When the day comes that a government cannot accept criticism from a body set up by itself, we are getting ourselves into a deplorable situation.

I hope the Canadian people recognize the danger of the message given by the hon. member for Waterloo-Cambridge. We on this side feel the review board, with all the integrity it has, and with all the responsibility it has been given, should at least feel free to criticize the government if, in its opinion, the government is wrongfully spending the taxpayers' money. Certainly, if this program is to work it will need the co-operation of all sectors of the economy—business, labour and government included. If anyone wants to exclude the government from the criticism the review board will be handing out to labour and to other people, there is no way in which the program can work; the government is signing the death warrant of the whole scheme before it even gets off the ground.

Mr. John Rodriguez (Nickel Belt): Looking at the amendment before us, Madam Speaker, I can feel some sympathy with the underlying principle of putting forward that kind of amendment by the Conservatives on my right. Certainly it is a concern, and it ought to be the concern not only of the government but of opposition members and, indeed, of the Canadian people with respect to the manner in which the government is spending the taxpayers' money. Surely that is the function of parliament. We have set up a structure. There is an Auditor General who is supposed to look at the way in which the government operates its various departments and how it spends the taxpayers' money in those departments, and then to make recommendations to the appropriate committee of parliament with respect to what he has discovered in his review of a budget or the estimates.

We on this side of the House have taken the position that that kind of board is not necessary and that the kind of program the government is bringing in is misplaced at this time. It seems to me that here they go again, starting to build a bureaucratic mulberry bush. It seems to me now you have them looking at prices, you have them looking at food, you have them monitoring prices, so-called, and now you are handing them the budget and the estimates to look at. Soon they will be saying they do not need 200 people, but 500 people, to work for the board. When they started out they were going to monitor 1,500 corporations; now it is up to 2,700. They now talk about monitoring 10,000 contracting firms or 5,000 contracting firms. I see this thing growing like a great big monster, like any other department.

Anyway, it seems to me that is an expenditure the taxpayers can do without. Certainly the government has a responsibility to spend the taxpayers' dollars wisely, and the points have been well documented in this House that they certainly can be castigated for some of the exotic