

Anti-Inflation Act

In retrospect I can say that the imposition of controls, while undoubtedly placing some limits on the free collective bargaining process, also helped to safeguard that process. At that time there were tremendous pressures at work urging the government to take far more drastic action with respect to that process; action that could well spell a more lasting curtailment of collective bargaining.

The advent of controls also enabled the parties in labour affairs, and the public in general, to re-evaluate the workings of Canada's free market system, to re-evaluate it and, perhaps, to rethink the apportionment of responsibility for the results of the system.

In addition there was breathing space in which to consider and weigh those policies, programs, and relationships which might best meet the needs of the post-control era. I can say that the Department of Labour was in a fairly strong position to respond to the new challenges because it had already started a process of self-examination and reassessment. This process resulted in a major reorganization plus decentralization into five regions, both operations reflecting the department's role as a vital partner in labour affairs. And of particular significance, the new order meant the department was well equipped to initiate a range of new programs designed to improve the work environment; to improve the collective bargaining process; and to improve the structure and process of labour-management relations.

Mr. Alexander: Is that what the \$10 million is all about?

Mr. Munro (Hamilton East): It is part of what it is all about. If the hon. member would like to forget some of his intuitive bias and look at it objectively, he would find it a very worth-while measure indeed. Mr. Speaker, I am sure that most hon. members will be aware of the extent of these new programs, which have recently been the subject of a fairly extensive program of public information so I will not reiterate them in detail.

I will, however, refer to those programs that do have a specific bearing on the post-control period, and on the containment of inflation. Six new initiatives are in this area of curtailment of inflation. They involve: a quality of working life centre; a new voluntary code of good practices; amendments to the Canada Labour Code; promotion of broader-based bargaining; the establishment of a collective bargaining information centre; and the establishment of a national consultative forum.

The quality of working life centre will concentrate its efforts in the area of increased job satisfaction, leading to improved organizational effectiveness. As well as initiating its own experiments, the centre will concern itself with the results of European as well as other North American experiments in the humanization of work, and will provide a range of educational, technical, and consulting services.

Second is the voluntary code of good practices. Over the years, employment standards legislation has set basic minimum levels—a "floor of protection" of particular importance to that majority of employees not covered by collective agree-

ments. As a supplement to these legislated standards, the Department of Labour is developing a code to advise employers of prevailing good practices on a range of personnel and industrial relations issues. An obvious benefit should be to reduce the divergence of views on industrial relations matters in general.

Third, broader-based bargaining is one of those initiatives designed to curtail inflation and improve the structure of the system. Of prime importance here is the promotion of broader-based bargaining in order to avoid harmful sequential shutdowns in key public services. Broader-based bargaining can be an important means of increasing public confidence in the industrial relations system; also an example to the private sector. My department is recommending that the parties concerned consider some form of voluntary bargaining coalition as being far preferable to a legislated solution.

Fourth, with regard to the Canada Labour Code we will be introducing a number of amendments to the code so as to improve the bargaining process. Frequently there are delays, sometimes there are burdensome costs, and there are tensions which produce their fall-out long after the formal settlement is concluded. Parliament will be asked to consider a number of amendments to the code to improve the balance of responsibility among government, labour, and management.

Talking about the balance of responsibility, Mr. Speaker, this is an integral feature of the fifth item of major significance in this post-control period. I am referring to the national consultative forum and the collective bargaining information centre. It will be multipartite, not possessing decision-making powers, but it can be expected to have considerable, and hopefully beneficial, influences on policies and programs in both private and public sectors. In general the forum would make for a better common understanding of the economic situation as it really is; what the economy can stand, where it is heading, what its weaknesses and strengths are. I am confident that the forum can be of real value in helping to contain the growth and spread of inflationary pressures, and more generally in its role as a disseminator of information.

The multipartite forum is a positive response to labour's request, at its convention in Quebec as identified in the Quebec manifesto, for a role in influencing the decision makers, fully realizing, I believe, that they are prepared to accept responsibility for some of those decisions providing they are permitted to participate on an equal basis.

As the government's green paper emphasized, the functioning of the market place can be enhanced by increasing the information available to the participants. This is particularly the case with regard to the collective bargaining process. We find, during this period of control, that these were some marked deficiencies in the information dissemination element throughout the system prior to controls.

● (1740)

Some two years ago we set up the Canada Labour Relations Council. When it first met, the need was identified for more objective information on compensation and economic trends. I