

Anti-Inflation Act

turned over to those faceless, irresponsible creatures who do not have to answer to anyone. Now they want a board.

I listened very closely to see if I could understand the argument for the board. I do not know on what basis the Conservative party has more confidence in this particular board than in parliament. I do not know whether Jean-Luc Pepin has acquired more wisdom now that he is being paid twice as much as he was as a member of the House of Commons. I do not remember the opposition being particularly enamoured of him at that time, listening to everything he had to say and agreeing with it. He is a fine man and I have no reservations in saying that; however, I cannot understand this new-found total confidence in Mr. Pepin's wisdom and competence, something the conservatives did not accord him when he was a member of this House.

Is Mrs. Plumptre to become all-prescient now that she has been appointed to the board? Does she have a pre-science she did not have when she was chairman of the Food Prices Review Board? In other words, does the waving of this magic wand of the government over their heads, and telling them they are now appointed to this mighty board which the government are going to put in place, give them all-wisdom, a kind of superknowledge they did not possess before, more than that of the 264 men and women sent here by the people of Canada? I have been looking for those kinds of geniuses all my life and I have had some difficulty identifying them. I am pleased that the hon. member for York-Simcoe (Mr. Stevens) has finally found two people in whom he can place absolute trust and confidence. It is a delight to see that this has happened.

The difference between the Conservative party and the New Democratic Party is very fundamental. It comes out in this kind of debate. We agree that inflation is a serious problem and important measures have to be taken to contain it. In contrast with the position of the Conservative party, we do not believe that inflation is the only problem facing our society and that it has to be handled without regard to any other problem. In our view, there are two problems equally as serious, if not more serious, and equally as damaging, if not more damaging, to our society. Those two problems are the unjust distribution of income and our abysmal record of unemployment.

This board is being set up for the sole purpose of dealing with inflation. It has no other responsibility. It was not elected by the people. Its mandate is not broad. It is not to do anything except look at inflation. If the board takes its responsibility seriously, which I presume it will, what kind of judgment will it make on these other matters? For example, will everything that is referred to the board be looked at in only one narrow way? Is this country going to be guided just by that?

When you say you want some measure of control over a federal budget, you cannot give the power to a board to decide what kind of social and national priorities are going to be set. This is what a budget is all about. Are we going to turn over to a board with a narrow term of reference a power that is the right of parliament? I ask hon. members in all seriousness if that is what they want.

Let us take a hypothetical problem which may not be hypothetical. The government, for argument's sake, has seen the light; it has listened to the NDP and has lowered

the pensionable age from 65 to 60. In other words, the blandishments of the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) have got through to the government; the government has seen the intelligence of the proposal and agree with it. The consequence is that more taxes would have to be raised and the budget would have to be increased. What would the board say to that? If this amendment is passed, the board will say that goes beyond the guidelines, there will be no change in the social programs of this country, regardless of the merits, and there will be no income redistribution. We have enough reservations about the legislation as it now stands, without taking additional power away from parliament and giving it to the board. This is essentially a political question. Income distribution is not a technical problem, it is political: who pays the taxes and who gets the benefits? Surely we are not going to turn over that power to a board. Furthermore, I do not think a board would want that kind of power.

The hon. member reminds me that we have had some difficulty with auditors general in the past because they have tended to assume political rather than auditory functions. There was some criticism about that. We would go beyond anything ever contemplated when parliament was set up to take what is the prime responsibility of parliament, the setting of social priorities and dealing with the multitudinous problems in our society, and turn it over to a board. My leader, the hon. member for Oshawa-Whitby (Mr. Broadbent), said he is aghast that the great Conservative party would even countenance such an idea. They pride themselves on their respect for and duty to parliament, yet this motion would emasculate this great institution of which we are so proud. I am not surprised that the hon. member for Oshawa-Whitby feels so strongly about this measure.

Because of the vast cost and the great contribution that unemployment is making to inflation, the government may decide, or be persuaded to bring in measures to do something about it. After all, the costs of unemployment are severe; they are a major contributor to inflation and loss of productivity in this country. For every 1 per cent of unemployment above the 2 per cent or 3 per cent that is acceptable, it costs this country \$2 billion or \$3 billion in GNP, by various estimates. We are talking of a loss of \$20 billion over-all. Suppose the government becomes wise, or something persuades them into a form of wisdom and they want to do something about unemployment. The only way to handle that is to increase expenditures and stimulate the economy. Are we going to leave it to a board to say that that kind of parliamentary decision is not acceptable because it exceeds the 8 per cent guideline? The board may decide it is for them to make those kinds of policies, not parliament.

I could go on and multiply the examples. I have given but a few to illustrate the inherent difficulty and the impossibility of the kind of concept being put forward in this amendment. I can appreciate one thing about the amendment: I am sure it is put forward in good faith. On the surface, the argument is very beguiling. If everyone else is to be restrained, why not the government? However, everyone else is not charged with the same responsibility as the government. Those of us who are being restrained are making essentially private decisions. The government is making what amounts to a public decision.