

Emergency Powers Act

Canadian Federation of Agriculture were before the government—just a fortnight ago—asking, not that the prices of farm produce should be frozen at present levels but should be increased. According to press reports the federation was asking for an increase in the price of domestic wheat; next, for the raising of the butter floor price and, next, for an increase in the floor price of bacon.

Let me make it quite clear—I think I can claim to be consistent in what I am saying—that I do not believe in freezing the returns which the wage earner is entitled to expect from his labour. Neither do I believe under present conditions in freezing the return to the white-collar worker for his labour. Similarly I do not believe that the returns to which the farmer is justly entitled as a fruit of his toil should be frozen. If you are going to start meddling with the forces of nature and the laws of economy then it seems to me that you must start here or there, and where will you draw the line? If you start with partial measures then of course you are going to create inequities, and every step you take will call for another in order to meet the inequities resulting from the last step.

The situation is just that, and I am afraid there is no escaping from it. If you are going to deal with it you have to go the whole way and clamp the tightest imaginable controls on the whole economy. I do not believe that the people of Canada are going to submit to the clamping of tight, rigid controls on the operations of the whole Canadian economy.

As one who has inveighed, I hope consistently, in the eight or nine sessions it has been my privilege to be a member, against the dangers of bureaucracy, I want to warn hon. members that the adoption of an over-all rigid system will involve the re-establishment in this country of a bureaucracy that would be bigger than anything we have seen as yet, and which would take some time to put together.

We are not without recent experience as to the wisdom of the type of measures the government has been invited in certain quarters to take. Only several weeks ago the protagonists for the imposition of over-all price controls were pointing to the United States. They were saying that, as the United States had come to it, Canada must come to it. We have had more recent experience on this continent since those broad assertions were made.

The experience in the United States during the last month has been one of progressive decontrol, and the rate of progression

has been rapid indeed. I saw figures the other day indicating that since the original freeze was put on a matter of five weeks ago some 200,000 articles have been removed from the effects of price control. It seems to me that anybody who can see in what is happening in the United States today a vindication of the argument that over-all price controls would be effective under present conditions, or under anything approaching present conditions, is simply closing his eyes to the facts as they have been unfolding themselves day by day in the United States.

Let me just say in conclusion that I concede at once the sincerity of my hon. friends of the C.C.F. in putting forth as they have year by year the same arguments as they are putting forward now. I will give them credit for consistency. Personally I think they have been consistently wrong, but I do give them credit for consistency. They can be consistent on this subject for a very obvious reason. As we Progressive Conservatives have been saying throughout recent years, the idea of control by the government over the economy of the country, of which price control with all its concomitant controls is a leading example, is a part of the mechanism of socialism. It is not the only mechanism of socialism. It is not the only expedient that will characterize socialism in this country if such a time ever came when the people decided that they wanted socialism, but I say that this is one of the characteristics that will always attend socialism.

Therefore, believing as I do in the system of free enterprise, I do not approach this question at all with the same ideas as the socialists. They can afford to be consistent on this subject. For my part I choose to be consistent also in my opposition to the sort of things that they have been and are still advocating. I was not elected as a socialist, and it is no part of my business here, holding the views that I honestly hold, to try to out-C.C.F. the C.C.F.

Mr. Sinclair: How did you vote on price control?

Mr. Fleming: How did I vote?

Mr. Sinclair: Yes.

Mr. Fleming: You will not find my vote recorded on the C.C.F. amendment.

Mr. Sinclair: You will not find it recorded, period.

Mr. Fleming: When the C.C.F. brought in their amendment two weeks ago I did not vote. No vote of mine in this house has been given to any doctrinaire subscription to what I think to be a program which will not work under present conditions. I do not say that