

*Anti-Inflation Act*

will be this year, which means that prices will be allowed to increase, according to the government's own guidelines.

Then, to make it even more difficult for us to buy this bill, in terms of its being equitable, corporations will have exemptions for non anticipated costs. What does that mean, and how is that defined? We will not know that until the regulations come in. There will be an exception for an unusual productivity gain. Again what is meant by that? We will not know the answer to that question until the regulations are brought before the House.

This leads me to another point which is objectionable about this bill, and that is the immense power we will be giving the Anti-Inflation Board, the administrator of the board, the chairman and the vice chairman to draft regulations, to interpret them, to make judgment on various cases, be they cases of wages or salaries, or be they anything which comes under the general purview of the Anti-Inflation Board.

I have been here only seven years, and with the exception of the War Measures Act I have never seen such an immense amount of power go to one agency or board without any direct input from parliament itself. It seems to me that parliamentarians in this House should demand to look at the regulations before we allow this bill to pass. The Conservative party is beginning to talk about these things, but at the same time it is willing to accept the bill if there is an 18 month time limit placed on it. If the bill is so bad, how the devil can they possibly accept it for 18 months?

This amendment is just one of the devices the Conservative party is using, in terms of its strategy, to work on an excuse to oppose the type of legislation that we have before us today. For that reason and others I cannot support the amendment before us, and I urge hon. members of the House to vote against the amendments which have been introduced by the Conservative party.

As we in this party have said, we have opposed this bill consistently from the beginning because we do not think it is fair. We think it is a wage control bill. It is easy to control the wages of working people. They are out in the open and under contracts, and they can be controlled very effectively. However, on the price side, we have said many times that there are so many possible loopholes that we do not think the government is going to be serious about controlling prices.

As a matter of fact, I believe the other day the vice chairman of the Anti-Inflation Board, Beryl Plumptre, along with some other members of the board said that the government should not be too tough when it comes to controlling profits and prices. After all, both Mrs. Plumptre and Mr. Pepin believe in the so-called corporate enterprise system. They believe that there should be profits and competition in our economy if it is to be healthy. If there are people with that type of bias drafting the regulations, interpreting them, and applying the law, I am sure they are not going to apply the law in a way which really restricts corporations, their price mechanisms, and the way they make profits. That is the kind of background from which those people come.

[Mr. Nystrom.]

● (1800)

Mr. Pepin comes to the job after resigning directorships in seven corporations. He comes to the job with a record which is clearly biased on the side of business and big corporations. That is his business and I am not complaining about Mr. Pepin. But I am saying that he is going to have a clear bias when he makes decisions concerning profits and prices that come before the Anti-Inflation Board, and when he makes decisions concerning workers' salaries and wages that come before the Anti-Inflation Board.

Another reason why our party is not supporting this amendment is that we do not see any control of professional salaries like the controls that have been imposed on the lives of working people. The only way that there is going to be any serious control over professional salaries is to have them controlled on a national level and taxed back at a rate of 100 per cent of any increases above the \$2,400 level. That is the only way to do it, but as far as I know the government has rejected that proposal which was made by many people, including several provincial governments.

Another question that was referred to by the hon. member for Oshawa-Whitby (Mr. Broadbent) was that the government is not going to put controls on the price of energy or oil at the wellhead. It seems to me that if you want to control the price of gas and oil, that is where the controls should be applied. If the price increases at the wellhead, the cost is going to be felt right through to the retail level. Anyone who purchases gasoline, for an automobile or farm machinery, is going to have to bear the increase.

We have said consistently in this party that gas and oil should be publicly owned and treated as a public utility. I am sure the minister is aware of the latest Canadian public opinion poll issued a few days ago which showed that 51 per cent of the people in this country want gas and oil under public ownership. That industry should be developed as the government of Saskatchewan is going to develop to potash industry, as a resource that belongs to the people, with the profits to be shared by the people and not the multinational corporations. We have consistently taken that position. If the industry were under public ownership it would be possible to keep prices down. It could be developed in a way that is good for Canada, or the resource could be conserved for all Canadians.

There is no guarantee that if the wellhead price increases any of the money will be used for exploration and development in Canada. If the government is not going to nationalize the oil industry surely it should make sure that any increase in the price of oil will be used for exploration and development. Any increase in the price of oil is inflationary and should come under the purview of the Anti-Inflation Board.

I have here some statistics from Statistics Canada which prove the point that, as the profits of gas and oil companies increase, they do not necessarily spend more on exploration. In 1972, for example, the book profits of petroleum corporations in Canada were \$393 million and in that year they spent \$512 million on exploring for gas and oil in Canada. In 1975 the profits of oil companies had gone up to \$845 million and the amount they spent on exploration was \$577 million. They spent very little more on exploration