

Anti-Inflation Act

I was an official and a minister throughout most of the period of post-war growth. I have the great good fortune to have been at the centre of decision-making during that period when the structure of modern government was being put in place, and I say from that vantage point that the things which motivated those of us who had that responsibility at that time were not the things which will motivate those who will have that responsibility from here on in.

We were concerned about preventing another depression. We were concerned that demand might not be sufficient to engage the resources which were available, about keeping everyone working, and so on. The emphasis was on expansion and on the maintenance of and increase in demand, and for a long time it worked very well. However, in the process we not only consumed resources at an enormous rate and ran up against limitations, particularly in the energy field, which we had not anticipated, but I think we also created a kind of bias. That bias is one of the concerns I have, and I think many people who have had the same experience as I have share the concern that we cannot go on thinking in those terms any more. In those days it did not matter how much confrontation there was between the various decision-makers. It matters now, and therefore I hope the government will continue its efforts to try to bring about greater co-operation amongst the decision-makers, in the interests of everyone.

Hon. John C. Munro (Minister of Labour): Mr. Speaker, in his speech the hon. member for Eglinton (Mr. Sharp) exemplified the same type of example he set when he was a member of the government. I think all hon. members would agree that his speech was a very thoughtful one and that it contained very worth-while information. I congratulate the hon. member for an excellent contribution to this House.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Alexander: He did not tell the whole story, though. I want to know about the 1974 election.

Mr. Munro (Hamilton East): I thought the hon. member for Eglinton told an exhaustive story, one which would challenge the hon. member for Hamilton West (Mr. Alexander) to refute in any detail.

Mr. Alexander: Mr. Speaker, if the Minister of Labour (Mr. Munro) wants me to refute it, I would like to put on the record that I recall vividly during the 1974 election that the Minister of Labour, other ministers of the Crown and other hon. members of the Liberal party appeared on television, were heard on the radio and were reported in newspapers in effect saying that wage and price controls would not work and that this government would never introduce them because they were not successful in the United States and Great Britain.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. Alexander: I remember, in particular, hearing the Minister of Labour say that his government would never introduce controls.

[Mr. Sharp.]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I am sure the hon. member knows that this is hardly a point of order. It is just an argument he could make in due time if he wishes to do so.

Mr. Munro (Hamilton East): Mr. Speaker, that was not a point of order. I yielded to the hon. member for Hamilton West (Mr. Alexander) as a matter of courtesy. I am still basking under the adulation which was bestowed upon him for his long years in public life, but I will not be naive enough to repeat my courtesy in the future.

Mr. Alexander: I remember the 1974 election.

Mr. Munro (Hamilton East): I am prepared to fight that one all over again, with the hon. member, any time. The hon. member for Eglinton presented a very comprehensive review of governmental initiatives and efforts to ease the inflationary process and the rate of inflation. I think the government paper, "Agenda for Co-operation", has also been an invaluable means of promoting the vital participation and debate that the government regards as essential if the right economic and social decisions are to be made. We had a good experience with that this morning when about 20 groups of various kinds with various mandates from across the country came to present their views and briefs to ministers. I think the "Agenda for Co-operation" was a stimulus in this regard and will prove to be one of the more beneficial documents for our guidance.

• (1730)

My own ministry has understandably found itself front and centre in the continuing discussion on the whole issue of control, wages and prices. All of us are aware of the stand taken by the Canadian Labour Congress in particular, but I am confident that we can look forward now to a progressive, co-operative relationship, as and when restraints come off, with the CLC. Great emphasis was placed upon this by the hon. member for Eglinton. The consultative process must be re-established, and I am optimistic that it will.

I do not think any useful purpose can be served by dredging up past confrontations and disagreements with the CLC or any other body, or even with my friend, the hon. member for Hamilton West. Suffice it to recall that when the government introduced its restraints program in October, 1975, our industrial relations system in general, and the collective bargaining process in particular, had become focal points of invective and discontent across Canada.

Certainly there was justification for the general dissatisfaction that had accumulated over a period of approximately a year following the general election of 1974. This showed itself in the months that followed through the unacceptable incidence of strikes that resulted in a record figure of man-days lost, and a record amount of inconvenience and discomfort for the public at large. With issues made more complex by inflation and its erosion of purchasing power, the collective bargaining process was further stressed by increasing demands over and above those concerned with pay for greater job security, improved working conditions, job satisfaction, equal opportunities, and other items.