

*Price Stability*

with land acquisition. Dr. Young thought this was beyond the scope of his authority and declined to elaborate.

Why should we approve this motion to set up a committee of both Houses to report from time to time its observations and opinions, and to send for papers, persons and records, to sit during adjournments, and so on? What is the reason for this request? I mentioned a few moments ago that there are 70 highly-paid officials employed by the department—and there are more to come. This is a complex organization in itself. Why should a joint parliamentary committee be appointed with power to call for witnesses, papers and documents, to conduct research, and then pass the information on to a department which is already established to do this very work? To me, it smacks of additional control of our economy.

I have never particularly favoured joint committees. They tend to become authoritative and hard to handle. I do not believe the recommendations which have been made so far even by committees of our own House of Commons have been accepted by the government, unless the government had already made up its mind to do so. I do not believe a joint committee will get the necessary answers. One of the questions put to Dr. Young was along these lines: What has the department done in the light of information available for some months now, to the effect that roughly 80 per cent of the union contracts in Canada become renegotiable in 1970?

I wanted to know what steps had been taken in light of the fact that the unions have turned down the minister's request for wage restraint. I do not believe a joint committee or any other committee of Parliament will be able to deal with this issue to the satisfaction either of hon. members or of the minister. I should like to know whether the committee which is to be set up would have the power to call the Minister of Finance (Mr. Benson) before it to explain government policy in regard to one of the problems which has arisen in relation to housing, namely, the continuance of the tax on building materials.

We pursued this line of questioning in the committee, as the minister knows, and Dr. Young's answers on the subject were extremely vague. It puzzles me why we should wish to set up a new committee to consider inflation and the spiralling cost of living, and then leave on the statute books a tax of a kind which directly affects one of the most important industries of Canada. To me, this does not make sense.

[Mr. Skoreyko.]

In 1969 the housing industry reported a rise in the cost of housing of something like 6.9 per cent. If the minister intends to take serious steps to reduce costs, he should approach his task step by step. At one time I asked the minister—if I did not, I apologize I might have asked Dr. Young—whether, if the minister was not prepared to let competition find its own market levels, he would tell us what objection the government had to instituting immediate wage and price controls, as was done in wartime, for four or five years or until the economy had stabilized.

• (5:50 p.m.)

Personally, I cannot see anything wrong with this type of measure. We experienced reasonably good years during the 1940s, during the last war. It would at least assure one thing to the people of Canada, including the business community and people in the work force, namely, that the price of commodities would remain stable for a certain period. It would give business some assurance that their profits would remain reasonably stable over a given period. It would control rents. It would also control land and housing costs. I can see very little objection to compulsory wage and price controls.

My argument is that although the administration of such a program might be difficult, it would be no more difficult than trying to administer this kind of department, particularly in light of the fact that labour groups in the nation have said no to the minister's request for restraint. Although business has not said so, it has not done much in the way of practising restraint.

I do not think it is fair for the government to delve into the private operations of companies. Neither do I think it is fair to set up a bureaucracy made up of so-called paper-tigers supposedly to give the economy some sort of stability. I have before me an article from the *Vancouver Province* which reads in part as follows:

If the average citizen came away from 1969 with the impression that the federal government hadn't actually done much to protect him from exploitation by business and the vagaries of life... well... he isn't that far wrong.

But there are a stack of government moves just around the corner that should mesh well with the consumer revolt, the public outcry against environmental pollution and concern against galloping inflation.

Yet, as we enter 1970, Canadians must face this sober check list: