

Anti-Inflation Act

exercise of these kinds of powers over such a long period of time raises questions well beyond that of economic distortion, reaching to the issue of fundamental changes in the balance of the decision making power within our free market system.

A second significant difference between the two approaches lies in the way in which one could and should lead into such a program. As you will recall, the Conservative Party advocated as an initial step an across the board freeze period of up to 90 days in order to have a pause period during which our government could sit down with the major interest groups involved and work out the host of questions which will inevitably arise with regard to any incomes policy.

Without the freeze, government is left to try to sort out the ground rules, while groups and individuals scamper to assert their special interests within the program. In less than a week we already have seen ample evidence of the kind of confusion and exaggerated inequities that result from the government's lack of any orderly introductory period.

Here are some basic concerns about Bill C-73. Beyond these over-all differences of approach, and with even the limited amount of detailed information available to us from the government to this point, we can identify several important aspects of Bill C-73 which concern us and on which we probably will be seeking amendments as the legislation progresses through committee.

Mention already has been made of the time period during which such sweeping powers should be in effect. We cannot support those clauses of the bill, especially clause 46, in their present form. At the very least we shall be demanding that the government return to parliament after a much shorter time period, justify its need for any extension, and obtain formal parliamentary approval to carry on the program for a further period.

Beyond this question of an effective time period there is also the issue of parliamentary accountability during the period the program is in effect. While Bill C-73 requires that certain, but not all, of the actions taken by the established agencies such as the Anti-Inflation Review Board and the administrator be tabled in parliament, there is no provision for any kind of comprehensive reporting to parliament on the over-all record of the program and no built in opportunity for parliament, through one of its committees, to receive and scrutinize regular reports from the agencies established by the bill. Given the massive powers involved, we believe some process of accountability is essential.

The bill empowers, indeed requires, the Anti-Inflation Review Board to keep confidential virtually all of the information it collects in making a judgment on issues coming before it. The bill does not require the board to offer publicly any detailed reasons or explanations for its decisions.

While we recognize and respect the need to keep confidential any information of a personal nature or which could jeopardize a company's competitive position, we feel strongly, as we have said continually, that an incomes policy can only function if people see that justice is being done and understand clearly how and why decisions are

[Mr. McKenzie.]

being made. The bill should seek to foster the fullest possible public understanding by ensuring that agencies administering this program provide Canadians with the maximum possible information on the basis for their decisions and actions.

Any process such as this, placing in the hands of administrative agencies massive discretionary power, obviously requires comprehensive appeals procedures in order to guard against the abuse of such powers. But in Bill C-73, clauses 30 through 38 propose such an elaborate and complicated procedure, such as carrying actions of the board and of the administrator through an appeals tribunal, the cabinet, and eventually the courts, that decisions may well be tied up for months in one appeal procedure after another. Justice delayed is indeed justice denied.

There are many other points in the bill, for example the penalty provisions and powers for police raids, that undoubtedly we will want to question in the days ahead. And, of course, there is the whole question of the guidelines themselves which are not in the bill but are to be regulated by the government.

We are making no promises beyond second reading. As already noted, we have agreed not to oppose the bill on second reading because we accept the broad intent of an incomes program and because, for now at least, we are taking the government at its word in terms of being willing seriously to consider amendments to this legislation. Beyond that, however, we make no promises or commitments of support for Bill C-73. Indeed, our view at this point is that, without important changes being made in some of the areas identified above, we cannot give our approval to this legislation on third reading.

We are also concerned about how the bill is to be handled following second reading. Given its tremendous importance to the people of Canada, it seems fundamental to us that at least the major interest groups be given an opportunity to express their views on the legislation itself before a Commons committee. The white paper at several points promises "extensive consultation" with the major groups involved, including the provinces, industry, and organized labour, and it strikes us that there being little indication at this point of any meaningful consultation with any one, a proper place for such consultation is before parliament itself so that members on all sides of the House can have the fullest possible understanding of the attitudes and concerns of Canadians before making any final judgment on Bill C-73.

Mr. Hugh A. Anderson (Comox-Alberni): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to join the debate on Bill C-73. More than that, it is an honour to put forward specific proposals in two areas to ensure that Bill C-73 will work to the benefit of all Canadians.

I believe that members of all parties agree that the results of increased inflation have caused, and will cause if unchecked, a rent in our national fabric that will be a long time in the mending. On the one hand we have inflation, and with the consensus program a failure we, as the government, looked at the alternative of mandatory price and wage guidelines. I would like to emphasize "guidelines" to make sure that in no one's mind is there confusion with the guidelines in a certain program of