

cereals and a few other food items. We were disappointed that representatives of the Chamber of Commerce did not appear before us. Spokesmen for individual Chambers of Commerce have since sent me letters and telegrams indicating their support for some of the views expressed by various businesses. I am sorry that officers of the Chamber of Commerce did not appear; I believe they could have made a significant contribution to the deliberations of the committee.

People who appear before a committee need have no fear. The only witnesses who need be afraid are those who are trying to hide something. Retail merchants appeared before us. One individual told us the amount of money he had invested, the wages he earned from his enterprise, the return he made on his investment, the number of his employees, the effect upon business of price wars and the effect of competition over which he had no control. I think there is a message in this report for each link in the food industry chain. Witnesses have a message to impart, and the committee provides an appropriate forum. If witnesses have something to hide, they certainly have something to fear.

Mr. Speaker, I see my time has expired. I simply conclude by saying that I enjoyed being chairman of this particular committee. I feel I received great co-operation from all members of the committee from all parties. And I do not mind a little political gamesmanship now and then.

Mr. Ron Atkey (St. Paul's): Mr. Speaker, no one denies that the high price of food constitutes a major problem for all Canadians. Most members of the committee worked hard, as the hon. member for Sarnia-Lambton (Mr. Cullen) has said. They worked very hard to find out why food prices were rising so rapidly, with a view to producing an interim solution which would work and which would be acceptable to the Canadian people. The difficulty was that some members, for reasons known only to themselves, chose to close their minds to some of the real problems as illustrated by the evidence presented, mainly because they had formed preconceived solutions and they wanted to make sure that the problem was stated in such a way that it would fit the solution which they were already committed to proposing.

The New Democratic Party, by its own admission, has advocated a prices review board for many years. This was clearly stated by the hon. member for Vancouver-Kingsway (Mrs. MacInnis) in her address this afternoon. Indeed, in her party's minority report it was made very clear that this proposition had been part of the NDP platform for a great many years. All one has to do is go back to the Croll-Basford committee of 1966-67. What was the solution which the NDP was touting at that time? A prices review board. Mr. Speaker, that outdated solution dominated the discussions of this committee, at least as far as the majority of members was concerned. It was interesting to watch the reaction of the government members on this committee. For them, the issue was: Shall we join the NDP in voting for a prices review board or not? This was the crucial issue when it came down to the nitty-gritty of deciding on the kind of report which was to be presented.

In 1966, the government members on the Croll-Basford committee resisted such a proposition. Instead, they took an alternative route and recommended the setting up of a

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Department of Consumer and Corporate Affairs. History will judge whether that recommendation was wise or not. In 1973, on the other hand, the government members capitulated. After some fumbling around, after some strong reservations on the part of a few hon. members opposite, they capitulated. The coalition is complete as far as a food prices review board is concerned. So we are faced with a solution conceived as early as the sixties, completely irrelevant to the difficulties facing the country today. And efforts are being made to impose this outdated solution on the country in a manner which I suggest is inconsistent with much of the evidence which was presented to the committee.

In case supporters of the government should take some comfort from the rather vague wording of the first recommendation in the majority report of the committee, I would draw attention to the expectations so clearly articulated by the hon. member for Vancouver-Kingsway. It is no "Casper Milquetoast" lukewarm board which is proposed by that hon. member. Let us consider what she supports and what her expectations are. The hon. lady, who is in favour of this report, is expecting that this board would have the power to hold the line on price increases. Indeed, it would have the power to roll back prices. Moreover, the board would have power to determine support prices and subsidies to farmers—arbitrary power, I might add. It would also possess independent powers of investigation and analysis as well as the power to take corrective action or, at least, to require the minister to announce within 15 days the corrective action he proposes to take.

It is interesting to note that neither the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs (Mr. Gray) nor the chairman of the committee saw fit to challenge or moderate the expectations of the New Democratic Party as expressed in the House this afternoon. The coalition is complete, no matter how cautious or vague the formal recommendation may be. Canadians now know what they can expect in the near future.

What is wrong with this recommendation? The position taken by my party is quite distinct from that taken by the NDP-Liberal coalition. We believe that the preconceived solution which has been put forward deals with only one side of the equation. It deals with prices. And in the food industry, which is labour-intensive, it is almost criminal to ignore wages in terms of a review mechanism. In my opinion, this is an absolute sell-out to the selfish aims of organized labour, the very power base of the New Democratic Party.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Atkey: It is a sell-out by the Liberal-NDP coalition. If I may make a prediction, this coalition will forever be tainted with the inability of this board to do justice to the expectations of the Canadian people. Those expectations are very high. I am afraid they will be sadly disappointed by this ineffectual, toothless board if it is set up in the way the NDP proposes and which the Liberal government has implicitly accepted.

What is even more important is that this recommendation has singled out food for special treatment. As I said at the outset, food prices are a problem. All members of the committee agree with that. But this preconceived solu-