Cost of Living

The Acting Speaker (Mr. La Salle): Order. I am sorry to have to interrupt the hon. member but the time allotted him has expired.

The hon. member for Assiniboia (Mr. Knight).

Mr. Poulin: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker, I would be most happy at any time to debate with the hon. member for Grenville-Carleton (Mr. Baker) as I have in the past. I have asked him time after time, "What would you do," and never at any time has he been able to offer a solution or indicate that he has any idea—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. La Salle): Order. I would ask the hon. member to resume his seat and, once again, I shall give him the floor in due course if he wishes to take part in the debate. For the time being, I call upon the hon. member for Assiniboia.

Mr. Bill Knight (Assiniboia): Mr. Speaker, I begin by saying that there are many hazards to many professions: miners fear cave-ins, farmers fear drought—but politicians are the only group of people who can sit up all night debating a set of figures. The figures came out on the basis of a month ago. While we sat in the House tonight, supposedly debating that important issue, in a television program it was announced that in the area of food costs there was a drop in every major city, save one, in Canada in the price of beef and there was also a drop in the cost of other foods. But, Mr. Speaker, no member has taken the opportunity to point that out.

In this debate I listened to the hon. member for Don Valley (Mr. Gillies) for whom I have a great deal of respect. I hoped to hear him offer some kind of program related to inflation and the cost of living. When it was proposed in February that there should be a 90-day freeze, I listened to a program that I thought might have some merit and I reviewed it, as I am sure all hon. members did. Now I hear it being presented again.

Mr. Speaker, I ask, what would have been the result of a 90-day freeze imposed in February on the people in my riding? The hon. member for Crowfoot (Mr. Horner) gets up in this House and talks about grain and cattle and is critical of an export control that affected 2 per cent of the beef production. Such a freeze would have meant that producers in my area would have been frozen at last spring's prices, when they should have been much higher. It would have meant that the producer of Assiniboia would have had his wheat prices frozen far lower than they are today. It would have meant that the price of oats would have been far less than the price today on the market. It would have meant that the working man who negotiated a contract with the co-op this summer would have had his wages frozen at a lower level than he deserved. This is the kind of situation that would have faced the people of Assiniboia.

I ask those Conservatives from western Canada who are enunciating that position what justice there would have been to these farmers who two years ago were receiving prices below the cost of production. What justice would

[Mr. Baker.]

there have been for them, in view of the way the Conservative campaigned last fall, promising to get a good deal for the farmers? Some Conservative candidates spoke of guaranteed prices and some spoke of getting a good return and net income; but now, when the producers of western Canada have finally got something from the market, they speak of across the board freezes for 90 days. What would have happened to the mixed farmers of Assiniboia if the price of beef had been frozen in February? The hon. member for Crowfoot says, "Look at what export control did to the free market? Look at what it did to prices." We know what it did to prices.

What would have happened to the producers in my area who were moving cattle this year, maybe 50 or 75 in a herd, if they had faced a 90-day freeze? There would have been the same kind of absolute disaster as that which hit the American beef market. I plead with the Conservative members, for whom I have respect, to oppose that kind of measure.

An hon. Member: Where are all the Grits?

Mr. Knight: I don't know where the Grits are, and I don't worry about the Grits. Mr. Speaker, this debate was initiated by the Conservative party. Out of roughly 107 Tories, there are nine in the House. Where are they? One is hiding behind the curtain. This emergency debate of theirs has been blown up like a balloon. They huffed and puffed all day, and now they are gone. It is their debate, but only nine of them are left.

An hon. Member: But there is quality.

Mr. Knight: There is some quality. On Monday some people said that parliament ought to come to an end. The hon. member for Don Valley (Mr. Gillies) said, let the people decide. There is no question but that in our parliamentary democracy, and thank God we are not like Chile and still have one, the people will eventually make the choice. When that choice is made, we will accept it. However, there is no excuse for a member of parliament saying on a Monday, bring this parliament to an end. We cannot disregard our responsibilities as members of parliament and throw this country into a general election. Absolutely nothing would be done about the cost of living for 60 days prior to the election and three months after that.

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Let us say that by some quirk, there was a Tory government. They said they would institute a 90-day freeze. There would be a rise in prices by the large corporations the likes of which we have never seen. I admire a party that talks about moving into the market place. Welcome aboard! However, let us not get into the singsong and say we will determine a course in 90 days. It will not work. If you move into the market place, you move in for good. If you move into the market place with the large corporations, you had better be prepared to do it on a long-term basis.

Should a socialist government have the opportunity to govern, we will move into the market place. The Tories will then stand up in this House and cry foul. They will say we are destroying free enterprise. We would establish national marketing and a two-price system for oil and gas.