

Consumer Affairs

infant. Apparently the commission is to provide a sort of rarefied study seminar empowered to call for information to aid its deliberations and empowered to publish information as to how price stability can be achieved. It is expected to produce reports which will be referred to a second stage seminar in the form of a joint Senate-Commons standing committee.

As an instrument for achieving price stability this commission appears singularly handicapped. It should be noted that the sessions of the commission are to be held in private, giving consumers no opportunity to watch what is going on, thus eliminating any possibility that the proceedings might have some immediate effect on price patterns in Canada.

The achievement of price stability is not the private concern of the Department of Consumer and Corporate Affairs. It is a public matter of the most urgent importance and should be so treated. If this Prices and Incomes Commission is to be kept in the private cabinet of the minister along with the complaints of Box 99 and the deliberations of the Consumer Advisory Council, we have no hope of achieving price stability. We can hope to achieve price stability only when the white light of public scrutiny is let into the secret places of government and the marketplace.

A second thing to be noted is that the function of the commission is to be purely educative. It has no power to act as a policeman in defence of the consumer. It has no power to intervene in individual price and income decisions. It has no power to launch inquiries into rising living costs. In short it has no power except to use moral suasion, a weapon which was already proved a broken reed in the carnivorous jungle of the marketplace.

What the consumer needs is not a study seminar: The consumer needs teeth. This commission should provide a prices review board held in the white light of publicity, empowered to bring before it those who intend to raise prices and empowered to make them justify by full disclosure the need for such price increases. With such a commission the achievement of price stability would take on meaning and reality.

With such a commission, participatory democracy for the consumer would become more than an empty phrase. With such a commission a strong anti-trust, anti-combines and anti-conglomerate policy would become mandatory on the minister and would lead to a Combines Investigation Act with real teeth, instead of the dental falsies that face us now. With such a commission, what provincial gov-

ernment would dare display reluctance in concurrent legislation to help achieve price stability? With such a Commission what provincial government would refuse concurrent legislation to deal with the wildcat costs of services such as the salaries and wages of doctors, lawyers, executives, directors of corporations and other groups not now subject to the collective bargaining process.

Finally, a genuine and effective search for price stability must find ways and means of making Canada less dependent on the United States than it is now. When the United States sneezes Canada catches pneumonia. In tackling rising prices in Canada the government has rejected any formal incomes policy or guidelines for price and income increases. However it has instituted guidelines on salary and wage increases for the Public Service of Canada. This is completely unjustifiable discrimination.

If guidelines are to be applied—which in the white paper the government has rejected—then they should be applied to all forms of income, including profits, rents, interest and professional fees. This is the kind of program which must be undertaken if price stability is to be achieved. Big Brother is undoubtedly watching; but so is the consumer. And for the consumer the time for action is long overdue.

● (2:20 p.m.)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Réal Caouette (Témiscamingue): Mr. Speaker, first of all, I would like to congratulate Mr. John H. Young on his appointment as chairman of the Prices and Incomes Commission.

Mr. Speaker, whether it be Mr. Young or someone else who is chairman of the Commission, it will remain a commission like all the others already existing in Canada.

The purpose of the new Commission is to determine whether prices have increased or not. That is a question that everybody can answer and there is no need for a Commission to tell us so or to determine that this is so. As a matter of fact, prices have risen and continue to rise because governments at all levels, federal, provincial and municipal, and school boards are forever raising taxes, and that contributes directly to price increases. And so, the Canadian people must pay higher prices for the commodities they need.

We think we are fighting inflation, or at least, we say we want to fight inflation by establishing new commissions. However, the hundreds of commissions created in Canada