

*Food Prices Committee*

justify their share of the increase in food prices that they enjoyed between 1961 and 1971.

If the previous House of Commons and Senate Committee examined this question up to 1966, that is fine; we will look into it with regard to the time after 1966. If the Batten commission on the Prairies has looked at the situation in the prairie provinces, that is fine; let us look into the situation affecting the rest of Canada, especially since 1966. I tend to think that the bulletin put out by the Department of Agriculture last September is largely correct. I think the department pointed to the main culprit responsible for rising food prices.

Mr. Speaker, I see that you are ready to rise and cut me off. I hope the committee will report back to the House on the items I have mentioned.

**Mr. Charles E. Haliburton (South Western Nova):** Mr. Speaker, like so many hon. members who have spoken in this debate, I am rising for my first speech in this House. I rise with a great deal of humility. It is a great distinction to speak here. However, the degree of humility I feel has been somewhat lessened in the last two or three weeks, I must confess; it has been lessened by the debates I have listened to in this House. It seems to me, as a new member, that perhaps that degree of statesmanship and wisdom that I had expected to find here is not entirely present.

I was interested the other evening to hear the leader of the New Democratic Party indicate on a television broadcast that in his opinion the members of the party I support are obsessed with power and that the entire program of my party, as evident during the proceedings of the House, was aimed at gaining power.

**An hon. Member:** You are right there.

**Mr. Benjamin:** Don't apologize.

• (2140)

**Mr. Haliburton:** Obsessed may be putting it a little strongly, but I would say that the members of this party are concerned about the quality of leadership which this House and this country is receiving.

**Some hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Haliburton:** It has now been several weeks since this session began. This party has made every effort to facilitate the business of the House. Our suggestions have been ignored. On each occasion we have ended up with a fairly lengthy debate.

There is another matter which was mentioned by the leader of the New Democratic Party. It seemed to be more or less an afterthought. He said that his party will do everything in its power to ensure that the committee which is to be established will bring in some concrete results. I listened with interest to the members of that party to try to filter out the concrete results which they hope will result from the committee. As nearly as I can tell, the objective they seek is the establishment of a prices or wages review board. That may be of help but, as has been pointed out, there was the prices and incomes commission which only recently retired, and the continuing

[Mr. Benjamin.]

task force which is presumably operating and advising the government on this matter.

What policy does this government have with regard to rising food costs and inflation in general? Does the government propose to put its future policy in the hands of this parliamentary committee which will, quite properly, be made up of representatives of all parties in this House? Do they intend to call on the opposition, which will comprise the majority of that committee, to advise them on policy in these circumstances? Are we being led by a government which calls on the opposition to give them their program? If that is the case, it is high time the government acknowledged that that is their position and moved over to make room for a party that has its own policies.

**Some hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Haliburton:** Why is a committee being established? I suggest that the reason is lack of any cohesive or coherent program on the part of the government. They are asking this committee to give them a program.

I intended to speak on why the time should be limited for this committee to bring in its report. In view of the circumstances in this House we are not speaking of a continuing committee in terms of one which will be operating for a very lengthy period. The members of the committee would do well to consider that they will have, at most, three months or six months to bring forward their final report. If it is possible for a committee to bring in a meaningful preliminary report after 60 days, it should be possible to bring in its final report very shortly after that.

During the course of this debate many members have spoken about one particular price or another and compared it to other prices. I do not intend to involve myself in that aspect of the matter. Contrary to what the hon. member for St. Boniface (Mr. Guay) said a few moments ago about the uselessness of this debate, I think it is incumbent upon this House to provide some ideas and guidelines for the committee.

If the findings of the committee are to be effective or valid, the committee will have to deal with a very broad area of policies, not just food prices. I am sure that members opposite realize that food prices cannot be dealt with in isolation. They are a product of an economic policy of the government. Unless the committee is prepared to look into the entire economic policy of the government, and unless the government is prepared to review its entire economic policy, the deliberations of this committee will be a wasted effort, certainly as far as any short-term effects on food prices are concerned.

If the committee is going to determine the reason for the rise in food costs, how can it justify ignoring the rise in the cost of shelter which has increased 4 per cent more than the cost of food in the past year? The rise in the cost of food is serious, but it cannot be viewed in isolation. There are short-term factors that affect the price of food, such as supply and demand.

A member of the New Democratic Party a few minutes ago mentioned a surplus. Can we imagine a shortage of eggs, chickens, beef and wheat in this country? In fact, we