

of accepting any such toothless wonder. We want legislation with teeth in it and we are satisfied that the consumers want such legislation.

My correspondence continues to emphasize the fact that people are expecting parliament to do something to halt this everlasting increase in food prices, and they know that more and more hands are coming in between the farmer and them to take handfuls of their consumer dollars. They want something done to stop this continual inflationary spiralling of the prices of those elements of food they must have in order to survive, and I give this warning to the government.

What do we want in this legislation? Let me name the points. We do not want a departmental committee or something under a departmental wing. We want an independent board reporting to parliament through the Department of Consumer and Corporate Affairs. Again, I wish we could chop off the consumer affairs part and make it different from the corporate affairs part. The further apart consumers and corporations are, the better I would like it, and I have always felt that way. We want an independent board reporting to parliament through the Department of Consumer and Corporate Affairs, and in the initial instance it would be a food prices review board. Later on perhaps, we might add other items of necessity to the consumer.

Second, we want the board to have the power to investigate. We do not want all this clamping down across the board with controls on everything in the field. We want a selective approach to those items of food which together make up a balanced and nutritious diet for people. Those are the items to which attention should be given. There should be searching and swift examination in specific areas of the food industry where quick action can and must fairly be taken. We do not want another of those great, top-heavy bureaucracies loaded with armies of civil servants.

Third, we want the board to have the power to take action directly or the power to recommend appropriate action to the minister. The committee has opted for the second course, that is, the board having the power to recommend appropriate action to the minister. Henceforth, in this speech, I accept the committee's option of a board with the power to recommend appropriate action.

Let me now spell out what we consider to be appropriate action. Appropriate action in the view of the NDP should include: (a) steps to ensure that prices be not increased; (b) rollback where necessary for the public welfare and, (c) support prices and subsidies to the farmers where these are necessary to protect farm income. One of the things we were seized of all through this inquiry was the fact that there is a great spread between what the farmer gets at the farm gate and what the consumer has to pay at the supermarket checkout. The farmer now is just beginning to recoup a little of the loss he has sustained for many years.

We on the food prices committee, and particularly the members of our party, are anxious that in the powers of the board there should be the power to recommend to the minister action in respect of subsidies and support prices where necessary to protect the farmer.

Food Prices

Fourth, we believe the board should have the power necessary for effective analysis of the factors involved in food prices. This means that the board must be able to summon witnesses and require the production of papers, books, records, financial statements, agreements, contracts, leases and all other necessary documents and information.

Mr. Atkey: And union contracts.

Mrs. MacInnis (Vancouver-Kingsway): Yes, and union contracts; the whole works.

Fifth, the minister should be required to announce within 15 days of receiving the board's recommendations what specific measures he plans to take. There should be no secrecy about the reports and there should be no delay in respect of them. There should be this statutory requirement.

Finally, these hearings must be public and reports and recommendations must be made public without delay. The board should also have the power to publicize information which may benefit the consumer.

I have not time to go into the detail these recommendations merit. What I want to do today is outline those recommendations which would constitute the appropriate action to be recommended to the minister. Anything less than those, in our mind, would not be useful and we will not support such legislation. We believe that these in essence are the basic legislative requirements that cannot be dodged. Food prices are still spiralling, and the government will pigeonhole and water down these recommendations at its peril.

It may be said that these things I have mentioned are not in the recommendations for a food prices review board. That is true, but I suggested that these recommendations represented only a skeleton. The teeth were not spelled out, but we recommended an independent board with the power to recommend appropriate action to the minister. I have detailed what we regard as appropriate action, and I have spelled out the teeth which should be put into the legislation. We believe that the function of the legislation is precisely to spell out the appropriate action the board must be able to take, and also spell out the powers with which the board must be clothed if it is to do the job of protecting the consumer in the matter of food prices.

I am not denying that this whole problem in respect of food prices is exceedingly difficult and complicated. Anyone who has been on the food prices committee does not have to be told that. The whole thing is a smooth, interacting chain from the farmer through to the supermarket checkout. This involves the whole food industry. Some of us are not looking for villains half as much as we are looking for those elements in the whole food chain that make this process of getting the food from the farmer to the consumer inefficient, wasteful and unnecessarily expensive.

• (1610)

We know from the people who came before us as witnesses that each sector believed that its operations were carried on efficiently, well and in a profitable manner, everything being equal, and that they were doing their full