

Mr. Deachman: Mr. Speaker, in speaking to the point of order in respect of this motion, I might say that I suppose any motion is amendable. The point to keep in mind in respect of a motion on an opposition day is that such motions come from one opposition party on one day and on another day from another opposition party, they are divided equitably amongst parties. On a day when one party moves a motion and a member from another party proposes an amendment to it, the effect of a vote on the amendment would be that the original motion would be pre-empted by another party. The government ought not to be in a position of interfering in such motions by the casting of its vote, if a vote had to be brought on the amendment. I would conceive the position of the government to be that we are here to listen on the days on which—

Mr. Woolliams: There are not many listening.

Mr. Deachman: —to listen to propositions—

Mr. McGrath: Where is the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs (Mr. Andras)?

Mr. Deachman: —put forward by the member of the party that moved the motion. In the event that the amendment were brought to a vote at this time, the effect would be that the government would be able to choose the motion of one party or the motion as amended by another party, and thereby interfere in a debate essentially reserved for the purpose of the opposition.

Mr. McGrath: It is a non-confidence motion.

Mr. Bell: Mr. Speaker, may I just say what I think Your Honour has to decide. Having said that the NDP motion is in order, one must admit that there are two separate motions, food prices and supermarket profits. If it is in order to make two-pronged motions of this nature in the House, then we can put them forward with three, five, six, seven or eight prongs and we in the opposition are entitled to amend one of the those prongs. We were amending the second prong, the one on supermarket profits. It is that simple as far as I am concerned.

Mr. Dinsdale: Mr. Speaker—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, please, the Chair is ready to make a decision. I really feel that my first thoughts, from a procedural standpoint, were correct. With respect to the hon. member for Vancouver-Kingsway (Mrs. MacInnis), I will hear her if she insists, but I think we are on the same side in the procedural argument. I have indicated the ruling I would make, but if the hon. member for Brandon-Souris (Mr. Dinsdale) would like to persuade the Chair of his view in the matter I will hear him.

Mr. Dinsdale: Mr. Speaker, I was not going to take part in this preliminary discussion until I heard the official whip of the government intervene a moment ago. He seemed to be suggesting that on an opposition day it would not be proper for any of the opposition parties, other than the one making the motion, to introduce amendments to it. I think that suggestion is completely off base. I want to reiterate what has already been said on this side of the House, that the amendment being moved

Increasing Food Prices

by the official opposition is precisely on the subject matter chosen by the NDP for today's debate which is to the effect:

That, in the opinion of this House, the government has failed to cope with the problem of steadily rising food prices, which seriously affect Canadian living standards,

During the course of debate there will be all kinds of suggestions, other than the profits of the food chains, why this situation has occurred. We feel that the Prices and Incomes Commission has a major responsibility in this matter, and we feel that along with the main subject of the motion we should stress, in an amendment, the basic responsibility of the Prices and Incomes Commission in this matter.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I should like to thank hon. members who assisted the Chair on the procedural aspect. Initially, I indicated my doubts about whether the amendment could be accepted procedurally, and I have to confirm my original thoughts.

First of all, I want to deal briefly with the point made by the hon. member for Vancouver-Quadra (Mr. Deachman) whose views were clarified and narrowed by the hon. member for Brandon-Souris (Mr. Dinsdale). Certainly, there are times and circumstances when a motion on an opposition day is amendable. Indeed, the Chair has allowed amendments, if not in this session, in the last session of this Parliament. On opposition days, however, we must look very carefully at amendments and the circumstances surrounding them, because if they change the direction or the impact of the motion, they are not acceptable. I think it would be unfair to opposition parties if such amendments were acceptable. This is, of course, in the interests of all opposition parties and the interests of fairness.

I think this amendment does change the substance of the motion on two points. In her motion the hon. member for Vancouver-Kingsway has requested reference to a special committee of the House. The hon. member for St. John's East (Mr. McGrath), who proposed the amendment, would have the reference made to the Prices and Incomes Commission. The hon. member for York South (Mr. Lewis) and the hon. member for Oshawa-Whitby (Mr. Broadbent) argued fairly, and with some force, that the hon. member who moved the motion has a right to put her question before the House and have the matter determined by the forum or tribunal that she chooses. The hon. member for Calgary North (Mr. Woolliams) has argued that it is really a case of one tribunal compared to another, as one would compare one court to another, but with respect I cannot agree that such is the case. I think we are talking about very different tribunals and that the hon. member for Vancouver-Kingsway has the right to choose the one she would like to suggest to the chamber for its consideration.

Hon. members have referred to the fact that if the amendment were accepted the reference to the question of profits of supermarkets would be removed from the consideration of the House. I think that is important and is a substantive part of the motion of the hon. member for Vancouver-Kingsway. It seems to me that we would be changing it substantially, and much more than we are entitled to do if the amendment were allowed. The hon.