

voting in the Committee on Veterans Affairs to appoint Mr. Chester MacRae, then Member of Parliament, as vice chairman of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs. So, the government has seen the wisdom of the step I took at that time. Since the government made that decision, I do not think it could have found a more appropriate member from Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition to appoint to that high position. I also wish to pay my compliments very briefly to the mover and seconder of the Address in Reply to the Speech from the Throne. As one who had that happy experience in 1969, I can assure them that it is an honour they will cherish long after they have left this establishment.

• (1230)

[Translation]

Mr. Speaker, last night the hon. member for Yorkton-Melville (Mr. Nystrom) said, as reported on page 454 of *Hansard*, and I quote:

Senator Robichaud who is involved in National Sea Products Ltd.

The Hon. Gérard Robichaud is no longer senator; he is Lieutenant-Governor of New Brunswick. Let us get our facts straight.

[English]

Hon. members will be happy to hear that that is the extent of my contribution to this debate in French.

No one can dispute that food costs are rising. It is a fact that is most familiar to those who are on fixed incomes, particularly our senior citizens. Most assuredly it is familiar to all of us to one degree or another. I was surprised to hear the hon. member for St. John's East (Mr. McGrath) suggest that the government in some way was endeavouring to sweep the problem under the rug. I would remind him that it was the government which proposed this measure, pointing out that food costs are rising, and urging that a committee should study food costs to see what action can be taken to stop the rise in food prices. It is my hope that the committee can do just that.

But having criticized the setting up of the committee, and having suggested that it will sweep the problem under the rug, what constructive comment did we hear from him on how to make the committee work? Mr. Speaker, the official opposition seem to be more content to move from newspaper headline to newspaper headline than to make this house work as the people of Canada want it to work. Who is to blame? That is the question that is constantly asked with respect to food prices. The issue is not easy to determine. We have heard a recital of the series of committees and commissions that were established to see if something could be done to halt rising food prices. The last committee we established recommended the establishment of a department of consumer affairs, and that recommendation came to fruition as a result of action taken by a Liberal government. It is not correct to say that committee reports are only put on a shelf to gather dust. That committee made a recommendation, and the recommendation was accepted by the government. Today, we have the Department of Consumer and Corporate Affairs.

The next step was the establishment of the Prices and Incomes Commission by the Department of Consumer

Food Prices Committee

and Corporate Affairs. That commission was subjected to a great deal of criticism, but the criticism generated more heat than light. The commission fulfilled a definite function, a necessary function, at the time it was established. It pointed out to consumers that there were areas where people could curb the rise in wages, in prices and in incomes, also rises in salaries at the federal, provincial and municipal level. It pointed out the problems and the need for us, in this time of affluence, to show some form of restraint. In my view—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The Chair finds itself in difficulty because, with the amendment and the subamendment, the compass of the debate is really very narrow. This works a hardship on members, such as the hon. member now speaking, who is delivering his general thoughts on this whole topic rather than confining himself to the question of whether there should be an interim report, including recommendations for action, within two months of the first meeting of the committee. Because of the rules of the House, that is precisely the confines of the debate.

I do not want to be overly strict because that would only prompt two speeches from the hon. member, one dealing with that particular point, and then one later on dealing with his general approach. This is something that might be given consideration before we meet again at two o'clock, to see whether the house leaders are agreed that the vote should be on Monday so that we may consider that we are on the general debate rather than on the particular amendment and subamendment. I really am in difficulty, and since we are starting off a new parliament it is rather important that we adhere to the usual practice.

Mr. MacEachen: Your Honour, may I make a comment on your very proper observation that if the speakers were to be held strictly to the amendment and subamendment it would indeed be a very narrow debate? Probably under the strict application of the rules of relevancy that ought to be the case, but it seems to me that from time to time we have overlooked the rules of relevancy, and no more recently than yesterday when the amendment before the House was upon the question of removal of the Senate from the proposed committee. At that time, most of the speeches were of a very general character and only touched tangentially on the question of Senate participation. I suggest that as a matter of agreement by the House, without asking you to associate yourself with any deterioration in the application of the rules, we might agree to allow the debate to be of a general character on all these subamendments that may come along today and later. That is the first point I want to make.

The second point I want to make is that I understand that it is not likely there will be a vote today. Certainly, I am operating on the assumption that there will not be a vote on either the subamendment of the amendment today. For that reason, this does provide an opportunity for members to talk generally. I hope these observations may be of some help to the Chair.

Mr. Lawrence: Mr. Speaker—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Does the hon. member wish to make a contribution on this point?