

Food Prices

got the intestinal fortitude to back up this move, then all right, on this issue it must feel that it can clean the slate.

What is our position? Our main criticism of our colleagues' report must be that it attempts to centralize the inflationary problem as essentially one of food costs alone. This is discriminatory and unfair to the farmer whose prices have to reflect his diversified input, to the processor who has to pass along all his costs, to the packager whose final product sometimes includes a greater charge for the container than for the contents, to the distributor who has as a main expense his labour, his transportation and his warehousing costs, and finally, to the retailer who we were told works under a harshly competitive system that some of us wish explained in far greater detail.

Out of all this the Conservative party members can only conclude that the problem is not only rising food prices, but rising prices in all sectors of the economy, including the government. Food is an important and visible factor but is not the sole element in the rising cost of living. Food products are not the worst performers in today's marketplace. While food prices have increased 41 per cent since 1961, many other products and services have increased even more. For example, housing costs have increased by 46 per cent, health care by 50 per cent and local transportation by 78 per cent.

Our position is that we believe only a comprehensive, co-ordinated governmental package can adequately deal with the cost crisis this country is now in. This package must deal with an over-all economic policy. It must involve much closer liaison between government departments. It must co-ordinate and reform taxation, tariffs, transportation, agricultural and manpower policies in order to approach the problem in an over-all manner.

Mr. Speaker, we believe that, number one, there has to be a reversal of the present Turner economic, monetary and fiscal policies. Number two, there should be an immediate but temporary 90-day freeze on all income, including dividends, fees, wages, salaries and commissions, and on all costs and on all prices except food at the farm gate. We believe that during that 90-day period a comprehensive package program can be worked out. Sir, I believe my time is almost up. Therefore I move, seconded by the hon. member for Vancouver Quadra (Mr. Clarke):

That the motion for concurrence in the interim report of the parliamentary committee studying price trends in food be amended by

- (1) inserting after the word "be" the word "not" and by
- (2) deleting the period after "in" and adding thereto

"and that the said interim report be referred back to the said committee with the instruction that the committee recommend to the House that

- (a) its terms of reference be widened to include a study of all prices and costs, and not just food prices, and
- (b) the government consider the advisability of instituting an immediate 90-day "freeze" on all incomes, costs and prices, exempting only the price of food "at the farm gate", and
- (c) the government consider the advisability of taking measures to stabilize costs in the Canadian economy and to halt the rise in the country's cost of living, after the period of the 90-day "freeze".

I make one final point. If the government, the NDP and the Social Credit party firmly believe that a food prices review board is the answer to everybody's prayers in

[Mr. Lawrence.]

respect of the escalating cost of living, may I point out to them that it will merely be an advisory group. It will produce only information. Therefore, why in the world are we even continuing this silly business of having a parliamentary food prices committee?

Mr. Speaker: Order. The Chair has very serious doubt as to the procedural acceptability of this amendment. I am prepared to hear argument from hon. members, either in support of the procedural aspects of the amendment or in opposition thereto. I might say that my main reservation is that this appears to be an entirely new question, and I cannot think that that can be considered as an amendment at all. I will listen to hon. members, but I suggest they would have to do quite a bit of convincing before they would satisfy the Chair that this can be considered an amendment. Hon. members who may want to guide the Chair may, at the same time, give me any precedents that they can cite for this kind of amendment to a motion for concurrence in a report of a committee.

It appears that hon. members are reluctant to take part in a procedural debate. At the same time, I appreciate that there is a difficulty in that we are operating on a time limit and hon. members are anxious that everyone should have an opportunity to participate in the debate after which, by order of the House, there is to be a division at ten o'clock tonight. I can also understand why hon. members might find it difficult to submit arguments which would support the acceptability of the motion.

If there were any way that the Chair could accept the amendment, then because of the fact that we have been proceeding by consent, by unanimous agreement and under an order of the House I would certainly be pleased to prepare to accept it, that is, if there were unanimous consent that the amendment should be accepted despite its procedural difficulties. But I have to rule at this time, subject to discussions that may take place later between members, that this is a new question.

The motion before the House is one for concurrence in the report of a committee. Hon. members may want to go back to the original terms of reference, which are quite limited and, of course, the report which we have before us is based on those terms of reference which set up the committee. In the amendment that we have before us is an entirely new question, suggesting that the committee report be not concurred in but that the committee be instructed to consider a number of alternatives which were not referred to in any way in the original terms of reference given to the committee. For these reasons, I would think it would have to be a new question, and I do not see how procedurally it can be accepted.

● (2050)

Mr. Baldwin: Mr. Speaker, I quite agree with you: I could talk for half an hour on the procedural aspects of this amendment, but I am not anxious to deprive hon. members who have such great contributions to make. I would suggest to Your Honour that, while there may be hon. members who have slight doubt as to the procedural acceptability of this motion, their silence at this time is an indication that there is a desire to divide on this issue.