

this country is unmatched by those of countries anywhere in the world. We are second to none as food producers. Let him ask his colleague, the hon. member for Saskatoon-Humboldt (Mr. Lang), who has been paying farmers not to grow food. I repeat, we are unmatched in our ability to produce food. Considering that, let me say the minister threw out a red herring on September 19 by saying that if we were even to contemplate or implement any kind of price control, price freeze or regulation, the result would be rationing. That red herring is redder than most and smells more than most.

I hope the minister is willing to volunteer to appear as a witness before the committee and explain why any kind of control, regulation or investigation of food price or review of price increases could come close to causing rationing. Let me quote further what the Minister of Finance is reported to have said. The minister was comparing Canada to the United States which has wage and price restraints, and he said:

—prices in Canada other than food, but including housing, have risen less than in the United States—

You will notice that he said "other than food".

Mr. Turner (Ottawa-Carleton): That is right.

Mr. Benjamin: I continue:

—and far less than any other country in the industrialized world.

Again, he was speaking of items other than food. Then he said:

That is very little comfort to the ordinary Canadian but it happens to be a fact—

As if the average Canadian did not already know that. Then he said:

It also is an answer to those who say price and wage controls would be an immediate solution.

I do not know, but judging from what little I do know, and I am not an economist, I do not think price and wage controls would bring an immediate solution. I think that for a number of reasons. First, if you try to control wages only, without controlling incomes generally, you will be a born loser, especially if you try to implement those controls. Such a wage freeze has been mentioned a number of times by members of the official opposition and also, I believe, by some on the government side. It seems passing strange to me that every time those people have spoken about controls, they have always spoken about prices and wages. We have yet to hear some of those people say something about prices and incomes generally.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Benjamin: When we say incomes, Mr. Speaker, we mean all forms of income. When we speak of incomes, we mean incomes that start at the top, the incomes of financial institutions and incomes derived from exorbitant interest rates. It is these interest rates that make supermarkets all the more expensive to build. Those interest rates add to the food costs of Canadian consumers. They are interest rates that food corporations are willing to pay because they can pass them on to Mrs. Joe Citizen who is shopping in the shopping centre in her town or city.

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High interest rates have not been a deterrent in the building of more shopping centres. We need more shopping centres in my city like we need a hole in the head, but we are getting more. You can go to any one of them on a mid-week afternoon and fire a cannon down the deserted aisles lined with goods and not hit anybody. You may find two clerks standing there, but that is all.

There you will find a large building, heavily capitalized and carrying a high interest rate. It is not being used for a number of hours several days each week. And what does the food industry do? Those great free enterprisers that my friends in the old parties support and make excuses for, they build more shopping centres and pass on their increased costs by increasing the cost of food, thus increasing the cost of living for consumers.

I hope the committee will bring in specific recommendations for both immediate and long term action in the area of transportation costs. One recommendation which might apply in the short run is for the immediate establishment of a prices review board; at least such a board could examine prices. The government could, when necessary, impose selective controls. If the situation became bad enough there ought to be controls right across the board on incomes, beginning with those at the highest levels. I submit that the incomes of the presidents of the food chains should be the first to be controlled. Let us work our way down from there, and the last person we need worry about is the woman working on the cash register at minimum wages in the supermarkets. Such people ought to be the last to be considered in the imposition of income controls.

Much has been said about the middleman. I refer to an article in the *Regina Leader-Post* of September 13 under the byline of Dave Thomas. This is a Canadian Press story. It reads:

Processors, packagers and distributors are by far the biggest culprits in the continuous climb of food prices, the agriculture department said Tuesday.

I am presuming that means the federal Department of Agriculture. I hope the committee will ask the new Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Whelan) to appear as a witness. It had better ask the old one to appear as well, because he was the minister when members of his department said this. They pointed out who are the main culprits in the continuing climb in food prices. According to this report, food prices rose by 7.4 per cent between August, 1971, and August, 1972. A departmental bulletin placed the blame for most of the rise in food prices on the industry's middlemen. The article reads, speaking about the bulletin:

—processors and dealers account for 64 per cent of the \$2.8 billion increase in farm food prices since 1961, with farmers themselves benefiting from only 36 per cent.

I notice that the federal Department of Agriculture disagreed with the former minister of consumer and corporate affairs, who said in an election announcement that increased prices at the farm level were largely to blame. Again, Mr. Speaker, I think the committee should ask the present Minister of Agriculture and the former minister to appear before it, and the present Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs (Mr. Gray) as well as the former minister. It should also ask the middlemen to appear, to