

The wholesaler is always considered the bad guy. The hazards that have to be faced in the wholesale business, and the lack of profit, have resulted in that business being accumulated largely in the hands of a few large organizations. Bigness is not always best and big firms are not always the least costly, even though the Liberal government over past years may have left the impression that it is best and that big firms are least costly. One prime reason which leads me to believe that the fruit and vegetable wholesale business is not very remunerative but, instead, is hazardous is that Federated Co-op, the largest co-op in Canada, has chosen to stay out of this business. I believe they have also chosen to stay out of the meat business.

We often hear NDP members saying that co-ops can distribute food more cheaply. I have had considerable experience in the co-operative field and have had the good fortune of travelling quite frequently to the markets of western Canada and observing the fruit and vegetable industry. I also know that no sooner had the NDP government been elected in British Columbia than they were saying the co-ops could distribute food more cheaply to the consumer.

Mr. Neale (Vancouver East): And we will prove it.

Mr. Whittaker: My friend from Vancouver East (Mr. Neale) says they will prove it. I should not like to hold my breath until they do. If I thought that by acting co-operatively I could distribute food to the consumers of Canada for 15 or 25 per cent less, then that is the vocation I would have chosen; I would not have become a politician and would not have come here. I would have done that because I would have been doing something for the consumer of Canada, something I enjoyed. I am not talking about figures in the neighbourhood of 2 or 3 per cent; it has been proven that consumers will not pay much attention to 2 or 3 per cent. I have an open mind, Mr. Speaker; certainly it is not closed. If there is any magic under the NDP in B.C., then that government could do this. What is more, I would be all for it. I would very quickly be behind them 100 per cent. I would enjoy seeing this magic at work, if there were any magic.

Under the NDP government in Saskatchewan the price of fruits and vegetables, according to my observation, was higher than in any other place to which I travelled. Why was the magic not used there? Why could not Federated Co-op, the largest co-op in Canada, perform the magic for that province? Supermarkets at one time were supposed to distribute food more cheaply to consumers. I do not believe they did but, rather, they provided an atmosphere that the majority of consumers liked but which cost more. Consider the wages paid; butchers are paid \$6 an hour.

A few minutes ago I spoke about the marketing of McIntosh apples in Winnipeg and the squeeze that was put on our producers there. It so happens that these apples were being marketed in a package that we did not want any part of. My friends to the left said to me the other day that packaging was being forced on the consumer by somebody. My experience has shown that the consumer has forced the packaging on the producer.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Food Prices Committee

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Whittaker: I invite those people to go into the marketplace and observe what is going on, because it is obvious they are staying home writing speeches and dreaming. The package I am talking about is the six-quart basket. We find it costly. It does not sell enough of the product and we want no part of that package. However, if we put apples in the stores in anything else, we will not sell more. The consumer is picking up the six-quart package; it must be put in the stores because that is the one the consumer likes.

I notice that my hon. friend from Vancouver-Kingsway is not here. Over the years I have read some of the things she has said. As well, I have read some of the things that some so-called food experts have been saying. Mr. Speaker, I have been to the marketplace and observed what happens, and those remarks just do not add up. What the consumer is doing and what people like the hon. member are saying are entirely different. I should like to see the consumer doing what people like the hon. member says should be done, but they have not been able to convince the consumer to do that. Therefore, we are compelled to do what the consumer wants.

An hon. Member: That is the psychology of selling.

Mr. Whittaker: I think, if we are to get down to the nuts and bolts of what is necessary, we need a cooling-off period in Canada during which we might institute price and wage controls.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gilbert: How about dividends?

Mr. Kempling: You never invested a nickel in your life.

Mr. Whittaker: We need controls that would deal with the total cost of living, that would attack inflation and do something for the people my hon. friends are talking about, those below the poverty line and those who must live on fixed incomes. Such controls would help all the people in Canada. I submit that many people in Canada today are living below the poverty line, and if they were given all their food for nothing they would still not be above the poverty line.

We are not going to help people like that and we will not solve this problem by hiding behind a mere study of food prices. However, if this is what we have to do, and it appears it is because this is the majority will of this parliament, let us do the job quickly, thoroughly, fairly and objectively. Let us not try to find one area that someone likes that is politically expedient, hide behind it and for the next five to ten years keep on calling for a study. This committee should not be the comfortable refuge of defeated Liberal candidates and supporters.

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Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Whittaker: Surely by now these are well looked after and the housewives, pensioners, mothers and farmers of this nation have no obligation to them. If this committee needs professional assistance, let it not be