

Food Prices Committee

• (1220)

Another sector of our nation and our economy that we should be careful not to hurt is those who are involved as workers in the packing and processing industries. Yesterday, I think someone in the House quoted the figure of \$6 an hour with reference to workers working in the food processing industry. It is almost impossible, when looking at the statistics produced by Statistics Canada, to know exactly what it is that a food packer or processor receives on the average, but I can assure you from my knowledge of what food processors receive in Toronto that it is a long way from \$6 an hour. So, there we have another very important segment of the food producing, processing and distributing industry in Canada which would be extremely vulnerable to hasty, inconsiderate action on the part of the House.

There are other reasons for not asking this committee to move to completion of its work within three months. The other reasons are of a much more positive nature than the ones I have just outlined. Many of us feel that there is something that is in need of a drastic change in the whole matter of food producing and distributing in this country. Many of us feel, too, that no matter what specific recommendations we put forward to change what now exists, we will have somehow failed if we do not start thinking and recommending other ways in which the whole matter of food distribution can be handled. For example, we have had attempts, some successful and some unsuccessful, in various communities in Canada to establish consumer based or indeed community based distribution systems for foodstuffs and household needs. We have seen in Halifax, for example, the successful establishment of a direct charge co-operative. We have seen a similar successful establishment in Hamilton, and there is an excellent one in Oshawa which has been able to establish and maintain itself successfully, mainly because it has had the effective backing of a very large and community sensitive part of that locality, that is the United Auto Workers.

Again, we can say that the case was more or less the same in Hamilton. If United Steel Workers of America had not supported fully the direct charge co-op in operation there, one could be allowed to wonder whether it would have moved at all. The direct charge co-op idea is a new idea in food distribution, not only in this country but in the whole of North America. It provides for a lot of excellent aspects. It provides, in effect, for real consumer control over the quantity, quality and pricing of the products that are put on the shelves. It provides for a very direct understanding on the part of consumers of exactly what goes into the pricing of the products they buy after the society gets the products from the wholesalers. It provides for a new establishment of confidence on the part of the consumer in the whole mechanism of distribution, because he feels he has some control over it and he begins to understand exactly why prices do go up in certain cases. It certainly provides for something which is extremely valuable and necessary in so many of our communities, and that is yet another way among the many needed ways to build up a sense of community among our people and to eliminate the alienation that so many of our citizens feel about the whole process by which this country is governed. Alienation among the citizens exists not

[Mr. Harney.]

only with regard to the political process but also with regard to private enterprise which is supposed to support society's basic economy and satisfy its basic needs.

So, it would be very important for this committee to look into these positive areas to see what this House could do to help Canadians establish institutions, vending and supply institutions in which they would participate, institutions which they would control. There has been some talk in the past few years of participatory democracy, and a lot of it has been very much like the talk we have heard about the need for action. It has been action but no specifics, and participate but no specifics. We have here a very real case of citizens of this country, as consumers, participating in establishing at least a part of the economic democracy which we all wish to see established eventually.

Because there is a real need to go into this matter of food pricing in depth, and because there is a real need for this House to take action in some of the more immediate areas which are more susceptible to correction, such as the matter of advertising—and I have given the House simply one example—and because there is again a very real need for the House to inspect new areas of positive action to allow the Canadian consumer more real control over the economic conditions which he has to face every week as a consumer, and because there is a real need for the House to consider ways in which the government of this country could aid the citizens of this country establish their forms of economic democratic participation in the way that trade unions in this country have done, I would like to move an amendment modifying the amendment put forward by the hon. member for St. John's East (Mr. McGrath).

Therefore I move, seconded by the hon. member for Sault Ste. Marie (Mr. Symes):

That the amendment be amended by deleting the words "within the three months next following its appointment", and by substituting therefor the following words: "upon the completion of its investigation, and that it shall make an interim report, including recommendations for action, within two months of its first meeting".

The clause as amended would then read as follows:

That the said committee shall make its final report and recommendations upon the completion of its investigation, and that it shall make an interim report, including recommendations for action, within two months of its first meeting.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Is the House ready for the subamendment?

Mr. Jack Cullen (Sarnia-Lambton): Mr. Speaker, since this is the first occasion which I have had to speak in the chamber in this particular session I want to express, along with others in the House, my congratulations to Mr. Speaker. It was my good fortune to be a member during the twenty-eighth parliament, and we found that all we had heard about Mr. Speaker at that time was most assuredly true. He conducted himself with dignity and, happily, with a great sense of humour.

I think, however, that the appointment which pleased me even more was your appointment, Sir, as Deputy Speaker because at long last the government had caught up with a proposition that I had made in the last House when we had a majority. At that time, I broke the rule by