

Food Prices

tions? That, I am sure, is what the majority of the members of the committee would want to see, and not an automatic freeze that could hurt innocent parties.

I listened, also, to the hon. member for Kent-Essex (Mr. Danforth). He seems to have a convenient memory. It was not the government which suggested that this committee should meet for two or three months; that was the suggestion of the official opposition. They thought we ought to wind up our work in three months. It was the amendment of the New Democratic Party which said that the committee should meet as long as necessary but should bring in an interim report within 60 days or within a two-month period. We worked hard and came up with an interim report.

The criticism we heard from the hon. member for Kent-Essex is the kind of criticism that is often levelled at a hockey player. For instance, if Phil Esposito at the beginning of the season scores six or seven goals within a certain period, you hear the critics say that if he keeps up that rate of scoring he will score 106 goals during the season. His final score might only be 70 or 75 goals. That is the kind of criticism the hon. member for Kent-Essex levelled at the committee.

I am not suggesting that we came up with all the answers or, for that matter, that the members of any one party came up with all the answers. We worked within the terms of reference laid down by the House; we tried to do our work within the framework of those terms of reference. I think it is unfair to set impossible targets for committee meetings to be held during a two-month period and then expect us to come up with all the necessary suggestions or answers that the hon. member suggested we ought to come up with. We are living in an age in which we witness what is known as the revolution of rising expectations. I think the hon. member was raising expectations inasmuch as he expected too much from an all-party committee of this House. He expected that committee, after two months of hearings, to bring down all the answers and all the necessary recommendations.

The hon. member for St. John's East criticized the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Whelan) and seemed to equate what that minister had to say with what the committee in the final analysis had to say. The Minister of Agriculture was quick to point out, on behalf of the primary producers in agriculture, that food prices in Canada represent a bargain, and that as a matter of fact food prices in Canada have been too low so far as the farmer is concerned. But, Mr. Speaker, we did not accept everything that came to us from the minister or from witnesses. In the committee report, on page 5—I sometimes wonder if members of the Conservative opposition have read the report—we find these words:

Impact of Food Price Increases

A significant number of Canadians have incomes so low that their positions were precarious at best even before the recent period of rapid food prices began. One major fact that has come out of the hearings is that the food price increases have turned some of these precarious situations into near-desperate ones.

We were endeavouring to make the point that perhaps for a large number of Canadians food prices are not too high, but that for an all too large and significant number of Canadians they are too high. It should surprise no one,

therefore, that if this matter comes to a vote I intend to vote in support of the motion. It is my view that we of the committee have done a good job of work. We were a 25-member committee which met anywhere from four to six times per week; we also met in the steering committee. All this work imposed a heavy work load on all committee members who read the briefs and letters which came over our desks or were presented to us. The hearings themselves were only the tip of the iceberg. There were briefs and letters from all Canada. We interviewed, and were interviewed. We talked and we listened. We had the benefit of advice from our special advisers. I think anyone who attended the committee's hearings would agree that each party used its research staff to advantage. How we did read! Letters, reports, newspaper articles, pamphlets, items—in fact, practically every type of written communication came to each member.

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We shopped, watched, noted and debated. We saw the signs hanging in the retail outlets. We wondered if they were having a significant impact on food prices. Being the kind of committee it was, we had political gamesmanships surfacing occasionally, sometimes to the detriment of the committee's goals but never destroying its over-all effectiveness. We gained credibility. Two provincial governments felt we were important enough to request permission to appear before us. Representatives of the governments of Alberta and Manitoba appeared before the committee. Many others asked to come before us. In recent days some have even demanded the right to do just that. We were a better committee toward the end. Frankly, I was sorry to see what was called a minority report, especially for the interim report, because I felt we were beginning to gel. I think we can do it again.

We had press reports that were good, and some that were bad. By that I mean there were good comments and bad comments about our work. In many cases there was criticism that was justified. However, some of the reporters who criticized could have done a little more in-depth study of the report. I was interviewed by a reporter who in fact had not read the report. He did not know what was going on in the House of Commons. He did not know that we were today debating a motion to concur in the report. A little more in-depth study of what we said in our report could have made him a better reporter.

We did not tie down many sections in the report because we felt it should have a broad-axe approach. We tried to cover many areas. It is very easy for members of the opposition and the press to say on occasion that the report is toothless, complicated and obscure. Those are the kind of words that are easy to print and understand. It is more appropriate to read some of the editorial comments by people who have obviously done a bit of study. They are not all favourable. I wish to quote from an article that appeared in the *London Free Press* of April 5, 1973. It reads as follows:

Food committee: a positive effect.

From the majority report of the Commons committee on food prices and, indeed, from the minority report of the Conservative opposition, it is evident that Canada is moving toward greater government surveillance of key areas of the economy, if not government control.