

It is recommended further that such a Joint Committee be established for the life of a parliament in order to provide continuity to its work and that it should act on problems referred to it by Parliament.

It is essential to provide the Joint Committee with the services of a professional staff. It is of interest to note that the Third Annual Review of the Economic Council makes a somewhat similar suggestion and outlines some specific tasks which a Joint Committee might undertake.

*Recommendation:*

That a Joint Committee be established to review consumer affairs and the state of the Canadian economy.

*5. The Influence of Consumer Demand on Food Prices*

It was brought out in testimony before your Committee that there is an increasing tendency for consumers to buy convenience foods. Such foods require a minimum of preparation before cooking and in some cases merely need to be thawed. In part, this is a consequence of the increasing number of married women in the labour force and the unwillingness or inability of many consumers to devote much of their time to food preparation. Your Committee has no views on the cultural aspects of this development but does recognize the fact that the price of convenience foods must inevitably include some allowance for the costs of preparation. If consumers prefer partially or completely prepared foods, they should be perfectly free to exercise their choice. However, if their time spent in the kitchen is reduced, it is to be expected that the cost of eating will be increased.

In the past few months, there has been widespread publicity and controversy concerning rising food costs. Public interest has been stimulated by the formation of consumer protest organizations, by the hearings before the Joint Committee on Consumer Credit (Prices) and by discussions in the press and on the radio and television. Your Committee has gained the impression, based partly on the volume of its mail from the public, that consumers are looking at prices more carefully. There are quite acceptable substitutes for many types of food and consumers can affect the prices of particular items simply by not buying them if they think the price is excessive. It is also true that some consumers could reduce their food budgets by shopping carefully provided the retail food markets available to them are truly competitive. The conclusion of your Committee is that if consumers are well informed and discriminating in their shopping practices they can reduce their food bill appreciably in many cases. Consumers education is a matter of such importance for the welfare of individuals and families that increasing attention should be devoted to it in the Canadian educational system beginning in the secondary schools. A vast amount of information useful to consumers is available through newspapers, magazines and the publications of government departments. Your Committee's opinion is that increased efforts should be undertaken by the government departments involved to distribute as widely as possible attractive and informative material which will help the Canadian housewife to be a well informed and careful shopper.

*Recommendation:*

That increasing attention be devoted to consumer education both through the educational system and by the wider distribution of information useful to consumers through government channels.