

*Food Prices Committee***AFTER RECESS**

The House resumed at 8 p.m.

**GOVERNMENT ORDERS****FOOD PRICES****MOTION TO APPOINT SPECIAL COMMITTEE OF THE HOUSE**

The House resumed consideration of the motion of Mr. Gray:

That a special committee of this House be appointed to enquire into and make recommendations upon the trends in food prices in Canada and factors domestic and foreign which account for these trends;

That 20 members of the House of Commons to be designated by the House at a later date be the members of the special committee and that Standing Order 65(5) of the House of Commons be suspended in relation thereto;

That the said committee have power to send for persons, papers and records and examine witnesses; to sit during periods when the House stands adjourned; to report from time to time and to print such papers and evidence from day to day as may be deemed advisable; to delegate to subcommittees all or any of their powers except the power to report direct to the House; to engage the services of counsel, accountants and such other clerical and technical personnel as may be deemed necessary.

**Mr. G. H. Whittaker (Okanagan Boundary):** Mr. Speaker, this is the first time that I have spoken in this House so I should like to take the opportunity to congratulate Your Honour on your election, as has been so ably done by many hon. members who have already spoken.

I realize that we are now debating the setting up of a committee to study food prices so I shall not take time to tell the House about the riding that I represent in beautiful British Columbia. I think it is one of the best ridings in Canada, as many people have discovered who have come there to retire. I hope to speak about my riding at a later time, because many members have spoken about theirs in glowing terms and I do not think that anyone represents a riding which is in any way better than mine.

Mr. Speaker, the easiest place to hide is behind a study, especially if one can have everyone else studied but oneself. A study can go on for a long time in the hope that the problem will right itself, be accepted or somehow go away. If and when this committee study gets going the government's agricultural policy on food should be investigated to see if it is contributing to the percentage rise in food prices. Producers know that over the years certain foods have been imported into Canada, driving the producer price down. Producers have been telling the government that sooner or later the chickens would come to roost and the cost of food would spiral.

The hon. member for Vancouver-Kingsway (Mrs. MacInnis) said that the farmer should not worry. Mr. Speaker, whenever anyone is talking about the cost of food, I can tell you that the farmer becomes very worried. He knows very well that when the squeeze is on, the place where it is felt most is at the farm gate. Everyone else gets their due; everyone else has a set price that they receive,

[The Acting Speaker (Mr. Laniel).]

or a set income, and invariably the squeeze ends up at the farm gate.

A prize example of this, and there are many, is a situation which occurred this year in Winnipeg with regard to the marketing of apples. In order that the producers of the Okanagan Valley could meet the price of apples at the retail level, a reduction on the f.o.b. price of 20 per cent had to be effected. This meant that the price to the producer decreased by 80 per cent. There was absolutely no way that he could make a living and meet this type of competition. It is said that it is the retailers and wholesalers who make the money, but in this case there was competition and the squeeze was on at the farm gate.

The policy of the Liberal government regarding imports almost ruined the apple juice business in Canada. It took us three years to convince the government that imports of cheap, highly subsidized concentrate would ruin the apple juice business for Canadian producers. We finally got a tribunal which showed beyond a shadow of doubt that we were correct, and then we got some action—three years later! However, the overproduction of concentrate in the world dried up, and today if you can get apple juice in its pure form—and about the only place in eastern Canada where you can get it is Nova Scotia—the price to the consumer is higher than it should be. This is mainly because of what went on over the years at the producer level and the importation of cheap, highly subsidized concentrate rather than building the industry within Canada.

The Department of Consumer and Corporate Affairs which was born of the last investigation has helped to raise prices to the consumer, not lower them. There is ample evidence of this, Mr. Speaker. In many cases it is the producer who has to absorb the squeeze on price, not the consumer. The cost of goods and services to farmers has been rising much faster than the price he receives for his goods. Such things as gas, fertilizer, machinery and labour—not necessarily the direct labour that he hires himself but the labour that is hired throughout Canada in the process of distributing, handling, packaging and selling his goods—have sent his costs soaring.

Farmers would also like to have these areas investigated. An investigation into the cost of farm machinery was held a few years ago, but as far as I am concerned the only result was that the supply of cheap tractors from England dried up. As far as labour is concerned, the farmer would like to have the same deal that labour has in Canada. He is not jealous of labour's position nor is he against it. He knows, however, that there is almost free entry into Canada of foods such as fruits and vegetables. They come from places in the world where labour is cheap and he is competing against countries which subsidize their products.

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When labourers come into Canada, they work under laws that specify a minimum wage; they start at wage levels that unions have negotiated for them. We are not against this but we would certainly like to be given the same opportunities. Somewhere in the world there are people who can do a job more cheaply than it can be done in Canada.