

*Corporate and Consumer Affairs*

• (4:20 p.m.)

**Mr. Turner:** May I ask the hon. member a question? I always listen to him with great interest and I was listening to him last Friday during the resolution stage when he said in essence that he and his hon. friends believed the government was not following a prudent course in setting up a new department to deal with the growing and continuing problems affecting the consumers of this country. Today he is suggesting that the department is one without any power. What has made the hon. member such a tiger over the week end?

**Mr. Nielsen:** There is nothing inconsistent between what I said last Friday and what I say today. We still say the government is following the wrong course in setting up a whole new departmental structure to handle consumer affairs. I might also say that since last Friday we have seen the bill. I would have expected the bill to contain some kind of provision giving the minister power to do something about consumer prices. Where is it? Let the minister tell us where there is power to do anything about consumer prices. Let him refer to the bill and tell us where it is.

**Mr. Turner:** Would the hon. member tell me where the federal power is?

**Mr. Nielsen:** Well, if there is no power in the bill to control consumer prices, what on earth is the point of the exercise?

**Some hon. Members:** Hear, hear.

**Mr. Woolliams:** Ridiculous nonsense.

**Mr. Nielsen:** With respect to food costs the decrease which was brought about by consumer picketing was fractional while the increase which has been going on steadily for five years is substantial. The cost of living index has risen more in the four years during which this government has been in office than at any comparable time in Canada's history. That is some record for a government. I never get violently partisan but I cannot refrain from referring to the kind of statements which were made by people like the minister, his colleagues sitting behind him and the Minister of Industry, while a Conservative administration was in power. I can remember them flaying us alive for not balancing the budget, for being a high-spending government. The Prime Minister referred to us as "spending money like drunken sailors". On the treasury benches now are the

[Mr. Nielsen.]

people who advertised themselves as belonging to a party which had all the answers. Remember the pamphlets? They had all the answers. Well, where is the answer to the high cost of food? Where is it in the bill? Talk about hens! These chickens are certainly coming home to roost!

**Mr. Turner:** The hon. member laid an egg with that.

**Mr. Nielsen:** I think the government laid an egg when it produced this bill, and it does not smell nice. I am convinced personally that the increase in food prices is being brought about not in accordance with supply and demand but as a result of monopoly or near monopoly. The general tendency has been for a steady and continuing rise in prices at the consumer level. The packers have not received all the gravy because the wholesale price level has remained remarkably stable in the last five years. The farmers and those who produce garden crops are seeing their prices go down. Yet these goods are costing more and more in the stores. If the producers are not raking off inordinately high profits, where are those profits being made? The farmer is not benefiting from the meteoric rise in prices; otherwise he would not be here with his friends battering on the doors of parliament to try to get in and speak to hon. members about these things.

There is no sense in mincing words. I wish to speak bluntly and, without offence to the minister, I do not intend to take an hour and a half in which to do so. The uncontrolled and undeniable rise in prices is not in response to the law of supply and demand but rather in answer to decisions made in board rooms.

Where is the provision in this bill which will get the minister and the government inside those board rooms, even if this were desirable? How does the government propose to protect consumers against inordinately high prices? This measure is an empty shell. The fact that prices can be brought down when housewives and other ladies across this country picket and boycott stores is ample witness to the truth of the statement I have just made. Certain board room decisions were taken as a result of which prices went down. But when the pressure was off, up they went again.

Here is a little more information from the *Financial Times* concerning the Steinberg operation. In 1959 the net income of that operation amounted to 56 cents a share. In 1966, seven years later, the net income was