

Food Prices Committee

Before going back to my seat, Mr. Speaker, I shall give a typical example: There are families which live on welfare, on unemployment insurance benefits, families whose head is working for Rubin Bros. Clothiers Ltd. or Utex Corporation, in Victoriaville, for a low salary or working for an industry in Three Rivers, Chicoutimi, Sherbrooke, St. Hyacinthe or elsewhere for a very low salary. When this worker goes home, he gives his pay cheque to his wife, looks at his children, smokes his cigarette and feels rather depressed. It is not an incentive for him.

Two unpleasant things happen which show the extent to which government policy is stupid, irrational and backward. First, the only course open to this worker is to push his union to get him a salary increase, and then prices unavoidably go up, and he is faced with the same problem. Second, when the mother of the family does her shopping, she does not buy her groceries according to the needs of her family but rather according to the pay cheque of her husband because of this crazy system protected by both the Grits and the Tories.

Mr. Speaker, that is where we stand in this economic system, where people are deterred from participating in production and from helping themselves, requesting from the various levels of government more and more social security measures to provide for what they lack, and what they lack is a purchasing power that will allow them to participate in the economic life of their country.

Before resuming my seat, Mr. Speaker, I urge this government, as well as their advisers and protectors, the NDP members to consider seriously the proposals brought forth by the Social Credit Party in opposition to the present policy which actually reduces the purchasing power. We say: let us give each Canadian citizen his share of the national output by means of a guaranteed annual income and let us give him protection against production costs and consumer prices by accepting this solution which is not a magic solution but an economic one, administered by men, that is a compensated discount which will allow us to respect the freedom of individuals and at the same time reach for the goal that this government and we are seeking to achieve, that is to make sure that prices will no longer be a nightmare for Canadians.

[English]

Mr. Terry O'Connor (Halton): Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to address this august body for the first time. May I briefly but sincerely congratulate you, Mr. Speaker, and your deputy for your well deserved elections to the status of being just a little more equal than the rest of us equals.

Mr. Speaker, it is of some encouragement to me that the government has at last formally acknowledged the existence of one of the serious problems facing this country today. Canadians have at their disposal many methods of communication with the federal government. But undoubtedly the most effective tool available to them in order to make their voices heard is the ballot box. It took this ultimate weapon to bring to them the realization of what committees, provincial governments, opposition parties and many ordinary citizens of this country have been telling them for years: that is, that inflation is a serious national problem in both economic and human terms. As encouraging as it is that their attention has finally been

[Mr. Fortin.]

directed to the problem, albeit with a sledge hammer, it is just as discouraging to look at the solution they propose.

As previous speakers have pointed out there is a plethora of committees, joint and otherwise, as well as royal commissions dating back to the depression. These have not solved anything. In fact in our modern setting, they may well contribute to our inflationary problem in the short run. Their very existence, with the possibility of recommendations involving some sort of controls, may tend to create panic price increases in anticipation of these controls.

• (1650)

No, Mr. Speaker, along with most observers of the political scene, we in the official opposition are not optimistic that this grudging acknowledgement of the problem by the government will solve anything. Notwithstanding this, we are determined to try to achieve some beneficial results from the exercise. Thus, we have moved our amendments to this motion to eliminate Senate representation, to limit sitting time to 90 days and to limit the costs to the taxpayers by restricting travel and the use of outside support staff. In place of "outside support staff" we may well substitute the words, "defeated Liberal candidates".

Surely, the precedents set during previous severe inflationary periods have proven the truth of these comments and established the necessity for the amendments proposed. We have endured a history of four or five committees sitting interminably, travelling luxuriously and exhibiting for all Canadians to wonder at, the usual three ring circus of House of Commons balancing artists, Senate clowns and government trained seals. And what has this recurring circus accomplished over the years? For an answer, we need only ask any Canadian housewife. Prices continue to rise and the scramble of wage and other income earners to keep up has severely accelerated the inflationary spiral.

I suspect, Mr. Speaker, that even the government knows that we can hope for little in the way of concrete results. They have attacked and resisted our amendments. But when such eminent government apologists as the President of the Privy Council (Mr. MacEachen) and the editor of the *Toronto Globe and Mail* impugn, not the amendments themselves, but our motives for moving them, they are admitting the necessity of the amendments. I will resist the temptation to comment on the motives of any member or party in this House. Far be it from me, Mr. Speaker, to suggest that the government moved this motion and proposed this committee for any but the most noble of reasons.

This committee will have an opportunity to make some contribution towards solving the serious problem of inflationary food prices only if it assiduously analyses all facets of the food producing and distributing industry. It must act with despatch, sit continuously and call responsible and knowledgeable advisers and economic analysts. Further, it must do something entirely unnatural and unaccustomed, to this type of committees. It must actually listen to the economic advice proffered, weigh it and be prepared to recommend to this House strong practical economic measures which will effectively combat the