

CONSUMER AFFAIRS

FURTHER INCREASE IN PRICE OF SUGAR—GOVERNMENT ACTION TO ENSURE PRICE DECREASES WITH WORLD PRICE

Mr. Terry Grier (Toronto-Lakeshore): Mr. Speaker, I should like to direct my question to the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs who will be aware that the consumer price index today showed that sugar prices have more than doubled in the last three months. In view of the fact the three largest refiners in Canada are currently being prosecuted for price fixing, which is estimated to have cost Canadians upward of \$125 million in the last ten years, what steps is the government taking to ensure that the wholesale price of sugar in Canada is responding in full to the recent drop in world sugar prices?

Hon. Herb Gray (Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs): Mr. Speaker, I am glad my hon. friend has confirmed that the present action before the courts arises out of the investigatory work of the combines investigation branch of my department.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gray: The act in question does not give us the regulatory authority to take the action sought by my hon. friend, but certainly the branch will carry out its responsibilities if there is any indication of possible ongoing offences against the act. By the way, my hon. friend indicated an interest in beef prices the other week, and I think it should be noted that the price figures indicate a decline in the price of beef and pork—

Some hon. Members: Order!

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. I recognize the hon. member for Toronto-Lakeshore on a supplementary question.

Mr. Grier: Mr. Speaker, I do not know whether it is possible to ask a supplementary to a question that has not been answered, but I should like to ask whether the minister is in a position to assure the House and Canadians that prices being paid by consumers for sugar on the retail shelves are justified by world and wholesale prices, and that wholesale prices themselves are justified by the cost to the refiners?

Mr. Gray: Mr. Speaker, I think it is clear from the information available that world prices are very high, and this is bound to be translated into the price paid in Canada. The Food Prices Review Board has been set up by order in council under the Inquiries Act to enable us to get that kind of information.

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AGRICULTURE

AMOUNT OF RETURN TO FARMERS FOR PRODUCTS

Right Hon. J. G. Diefenbaker (Prince Albert): Mr. Speaker, on these questions in respect of which there has been so much theoretical discussion, I have been watching the Minister of Agriculture—a practical person—and I am going to direct my question to him.

Oral Questions

An hon. Member: Wake up, Eugene.

Mr. Diefenbaker: Is not his view that, as far as food prices are concerned, farmers today are getting less than they should of the total amount of the national pie? In other words, the prices they receive are below the level of those that would provide farmers with a fair return?

Hon. E. F. Whelan (Minister of Agriculture): Mr. Speaker, I can honestly say that in respect of some commodities that is true but in respect of others it is not.

Mr. Diefenbaker: We are making some progress, Mr. Speaker. I would ask the minister to separate the two, because he is speaking differently here in the House than he does outside. Which are the farm prices that are not in the category of the question I asked, in other words, that are not justified?

Mr. Whelan: Mr. Speaker, there is no doubt that the cereal grain people are getting a very fair price for the cereal grain they are selling. The people selling pork, turkeys and some other poultry products, and beef are probably not receiving the return which they should; and I have said that.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Whelan: If you read the latest speech I made in Chatsworth, up in Grey-Bruce in the riding of the hon. member for Bruce, you will see that I said that publicly.

Mr. Diefenbaker: Mr. Speaker, now that we have the farmers exculpated, generally speaking, from responsibility for generally high prices, what are the particular farm products in respect of which there is gouging, or anything like gouging as described by the allies of the Liberal government who sit to my left?

Mr. Whelan: Mr. Speaker, I know of no farm products in respect of which they are gouging the public at all. If we want farmers to produce, we will have to make that clear, and that includes making it clear to everybody in this House. We will not get them to produce if people like the hon. member for St. John's East keep yelling about prices, as he has, and seeming to blame the farmers.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Diefenbaker: Now we know the farmers are not to blame.

Mr. McGrath: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a question of privilege.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. McGrath: I raised this question in the House today because Canada now has a rate of inflation of 10.4 per cent and the cost of food in this country has gone up over 18 per cent. The minister should know, if anybody in this House should, that there are people in this country who are suffering because of the government's attitude.