

cy of the situation and report promptly to the House, I propose to place an amendment before the House.

I move, therefore, Mr. Speaker, seconded by the hon. member for Trinity (Mr. Hellyer):

That the motion be amended by inserting therein, next after the third paragraph thereof, the following:

"That the said committee shall make its final report and recommendations within the three months next following its appointment."

• (1210)

[Translation]

Mr. John Harney (Scarborough West): Mr. Speaker, since this is the first time I rise in this House other than at the oral questions period, I should like, first of all, to congratulate you and your Deputy (Mr. McCleave) on your appointment to your respective posts.

[English]

Mr. Speaker, since yesterday I have been listening to the various remarks which have been made on the matter of the special committee of the House on food prices. I have been trying to thread my way through the rather tortuous logic. I could assume that the tortuous logic came from all quarters of the House, but we have had a very good sample of it from the benches immediately to my right. On the one hand, I hear that this is a matter of a crisis and a matter of enormous urgency. Precedents have been cited to the effect that there have been many studies made on the matter of food prices by this House, the other place and by the two places combined. This also leads me to believe the whole matter of food prices is an extremely complex and difficult one, that we really cannot study the whole matter of the rise in food prices within a very short time and make any real analysis of what causes this part of our economy go off kilter every once in a while or, as most housewives would indicate, go off kilter most of the time.

Usually this House and the country is enjoined by the members of the Progressive Conservative party—and here I speak traditionally and historically—to proceed with caution. Surely, it is the function of a Conservative group to advise the nation that care must be taken and haste made but made slowly. Yesterday, however, we heard there was a crisis at hand and heard accusations from the Tory benches to the effect that the government has been doing nothing and that action is needed. Mind you, in all these calls for action there have been no specific suggestions concerning what kind of action should be taken, so what we see now in this House is a shift in the Progressive Conservative "mot d'ordre". It is not a matter of making haste slowly but doing nothing swiftly. One may be allowed to suspect that the Tories—I am not talking about motives but rather reasons—have unspoken reasons for having the study of this very complex matter completed within three months. I just may be that the kind of action they are urging on the government, properly defined, is a form of inaction and that really what they want is that there be nothing done on this whole question but that it be done with dispatch.

Last night the hon. member for Yorkton-Melville (Mr. Nystrom) read us a rather dreary list of people in the other place who have overt and open connections with the

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food industry in Canada. I am sure that if we were to project this list a little further we would find many members of the loyal opposition who also have direct and indirect interests in the food industry in Canada.

Mrs. MacInnis (Vancouver-Kingsway): And on the other side.

Mr. Harney: We will get to the other side eventually. I think what we really need to do is change the approach of this committee in such a way that it will be able to pursue the matter in depth and not be a nine-day or three-month wonder of a committee but rather a committee which will be able to solve a problem which has been besetting this country for a long time. It is a problem which has been facing every household with intensity. For this reason at least, we must charge this committee with the need to report to this House and to the nation this winter, particularly on some of the worst aspects and abuses of the pricing system in Canada.

It is not necessary to have a committee of this House to tell the average Canadian housewife that a good part of the price she pays for food must be attributable to the excessive cost of advertising. In my city of Toronto one day a week the great dailies publish enormous advertising sections detailing in print and in picture for the benefit of the poor housewife exactly what a roast of beef looks like. She would be quite satisfied with a simple little list printed in a certain part of the paper collating the prices of the various cuts of meat and various other foodstuffs store by store, and supermarket by supermarket. She has to plough through reams and reams of print and pages and pages of pictures which very often at best could be said to be misleading in respect of the actual economies she would receive if she pursued the urging of the advertisement. Certainly at that level a committee of inquiry such as we are discussing in this House could act very quickly. This is a problem which is obvious to practically everybody in this country, if not to every member in this House.

What we have before us is a very complex problem. It is one which is deep-rooted and which goes into the very nature of the production and distributive system in this country. At the same time, there are aspects of the problem which any person with any common sense could tell us are subject to immediate action. If we subscribe to the amendment from the Progressive Conservative benches proposed by the hon. member for St. John's East (Mr. McGrath) not only would we be running the risk of doing nothing but would also be running the concomitant risk, to use his own words, of damaging one very important sector of our nation. Members of my party yesterday made the very important point that this House must not act swiftly to the point of detrimentally affecting the interests of the basic producers in this country. The people in this country who stand to lose the most and be hurt the most by hasty action on the whole question of the price of food, food production and distribution are the basic producers, the farmers of this country. As the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Whelan) pointed out, it is only recently that they have begun to receive something like a part of the kind of price they should have been receiving a long time ago.