

Food Prices

about the very evident fact that wages have increased by 5 per cent, on average, over the last four or five years and will increase by 5 per cent this year and next year. This means the cost of food will increase by that amount as well, unless there is drastic curtailment at the producer end. There will be an increase in the price of food if wages go up. There is nothing in the report to say that, based on increased prices and built-in cost, the price of food would not continue to rise. There are just nebulous solutions put in there to relieve this government of responsibility for an economic program that has caused the highest inflation in the western world apart from two other nations.

This government points its finger at the United States. Mr. Speaker, housewives in this country would love to be submitted to the increase in the cost of living that is evident in the United States, rather than that in Canada. It is all right for the minister to ridicule this party because we asked the government to consider a plan that has worked, over one which no one is sure will work or how long it would take. Even the hon. member for Vancouver-Kingsway who introduced this proposition to the committee, and may I say that she worked hard in the committee—

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

An hon. Member: That is the best part of your speech.

Mr. Danforth: Even the hon. lady herself expressed tremendous doubt in her own proposition. If members opposite had been in the House to listen to what she said, they would know it would need a tremendous amount of legislation to obtain absolute government control in order to make this proposition work. Mr. Speaker, through its minister the government did not propose to bring in legislation; they said they were going to send this report to cabinet for study.

Mr. Gray: No, I did not.

Mr. Danforth: The price of food continues to rise while these people study and study and study. If people in this country have an opportunity at all, hon. members opposite will soon have a lot of time to study.

Mr. Speaker, I cannot accept this interim report, because I am convinced that it does not represent the best efforts that can be made by the committee. The committee had just started to work, to get an idea where it should hone in on the basic facts if it was to make a reasonable report, then it was faced with producing an interim report which, by the government's own action, had to be produced after only 60 days of study.

Mr. Gray: You wanted the whole committee to wind up in only three months.

Mr. Danforth: The reason for this, Mr. Speaker, was the absolutely impossible demand of this government for an interim report to solve the food problem in Canada, which just was not possible. That is why we have no faith in this committee. We knew, also, that this was panic action by the government to place the whole responsibility for controlling the increase in food prices on the committee. We could not even ask a question in this House during the past 60 days, Mr. Speaker, on what the government pro-

[Mr. Danforth.]

posed to do about the increase in food prices, because the answer would have been that a standing committee of parliament was studying the matter and was instructed to bring in a report.

In conclusion, I cannot support this interim report and I will not support it. But I hope the government in its wisdom will allow the committee to hold further hearings and that we will have an opportunity to study the problem in a businesslike way, so we can produce a report that makes some sense and has some justification to the consumers of this country.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Laniel): Order, please. It being six o'clock, I do now leave the chair until eight o'clock.

At six o'clock the House took recess.

AFTER RECESS

The House resumed at 8 p.m.

Mr. Jack Cullen (Sarnia-Lambton): Mr. Speaker, at the beginning of the committee hearings during the last part of May, in radio interviews I indicated at the outset the paradox of rising food prices. It was that probably everyone was to blame, and possibly no one. After almost two months of hearings, listening to many witnesses and reading letters and briefs, I have yet to change my view in that respect. Most assuredly, food prices are rising. We did not need a committee to tell us that. What we were endeavouring to find out was if there was, and to what extent there was, a villain of the piece.

I listened with interest to the hon. member for St. John's East (Mr. McGrath) and note that his party and members of his party on the committee accept five of the six recommendations of the first report. There is no such thing as a majority report. Mr. Speaker, when you consider that this was a 25-member committee composed of ten Conservatives, ten Liberals, three NDP members and two Créditistes, I think it is significant and commendable that the committee came up with a report containing six recommendations, five of which have won acceptance by all parties in this House.

The Conservatives indicate that they would impose a 90-day freeze. The committee as a whole could not accept that. In saying that, I speak as an individual member of the committee. It could not accept it because it would work to the detriment of innocent parties in the food chain. There are some who should not have their prices, wages, dividends or profits frozen. I submit that just automatically imposing a 90-day freeze on all prices would work to the detriment of innocent parties who are suffering from increased food prices. Therefore I could not accept that suggestion, Mr. Speaker.

Although I would welcome a food prices review board, the adjective to be used in connection with such a board is "independent". I think that is the kind of board the committee would wish to see established. Is it better not to review prices, to review profits, to look at packaging, to look at what retailers have been doing, to look at what farmers are earning, and then to come up with sugges-