

### *Food Prices*

The new policy must also recognize that our livestock and poultry feeders are the customers for this feed grain and as such they have to be considered in the feed grain price determination.

The proper implementation of these two recommendations could very well determine whether our major Canadian agricultural components continue as a private enterprise or become a public utility. The only fundamental answer to unduly high food costs is increased agricultural production which should continue to be more efficient and more competitive.

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

**Mr. Hargrave:** Finally, we should remember, and remember well, the words of the United States Secretary of Agriculture, Mr. Butz, who said on his recent trip to Canada: "You can't get more by paying less".

**Mr. B. Keith Penner (Thunder Bay):** Mr. Speaker, I begin by commending the hon. member who has just spoken. I think his contribution to this debate has been an excellent one. Much has been said about the price of meat at all levels up to the retail level, yet there has been so little information and so little understanding of what goes into the price of this important product. I think the hon. member has made a very valuable contribution to the debate this evening.

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

**Mr. Penner:** The hon. member for St. John's East (Mr. McGrath) who opened the debate today wondered out loud why it was that two other members of the House saw fit to move, as he had done, concurrence in the second report of the Special Committee on Trends in Food Prices. I certainly cannot speak for the hon. member for Toronto-Lakeshore (Mr. Grier), but my motion was placed on the order paper because I felt that the hon. member for St. John's East would never get around to moving his motion. It had been there since July 25.

However, I am rather puzzled by the fact that the hon. member for St. John's East commended this report and praised it, in fact moved its concurrence, and then another member of his party, the hon. member for St. Paul's (Mr. Atkey) said it was totally inadequate; he did not wish to see it concurred in but, rather, sent back to the committee.

**Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre):** This is what you call Progressive Conservatism.

**Mr. Penner:** This contradiction is rather puzzling in the debate today. But I think this debate, which is one in a series we have had on inflation, is important because once again it helps us to understand just how immensely complex is the problem of inflation which we are facing. One of the remarkable aspects of any inflationary economy is that it is a love-hate relationship. Everyone loves the inflation which benefits them, but hates the inflation of someone else for which they have to pay a little more.

The hon. member for St. John's East—who, by the way, is a very able and valuable member of the Special Committee on Trends in Food Prices—in moving this motion today gave us one of his usual, very vigorous speeches. He

[Mr. Hargrave.]

struck out wildly in a great many directions, but I felt that all his punches really lacked substance. He did not even bother to give us the usual litany from the other side of the House about freezes and price controls which we have come to expect as part of the daily ritual. He really had nothing to offer today, on behalf of his party, on how to cope effectively with the problem of inflation. I thought, also, that his criticisms of the government's actions were really far from convincing. However, he did his best and that is all that can be expected of any of us.

There is no doubt that all members of the House share the serious concern of those whom we represent about the recent dramatic increases in food prices. Nobody on any side of the House can say that they have a monopoly on the concern for this problem. More recent indications of a reversal in the trend in food prices are certainly most welcome. What price reductions have taken place in recent weeks, of course, do not give any of us cause to breathe a little easier, but there is certainly hope.

I have here a report by the Canadian Press which indicates that a cross-Canada survey taken last Thursday by CP and covering 17 common food items shows a decline in most major cities from prices last Thursday compared with the end of August. It was conducted where possible in large supermarkets, and prices on September 13 were compared with those on August 28 for the same 17 items. So I say there is some cause for hope, but not enough at this moment for any of us actually to begin to breathe easily.

● (2130)

In particular—the hon. member for St. John's East brought this out in his speech—we are all disturbed about the impact of rising food prices on families with fixed and limited incomes. They, of course, are the ones for whom we must have the most concern. It was for that reason that the government sought the speedy approval of parliament to increase family allowances and old age pensions. There will be more of those increases in 1974. As well, Mr. Speaker, subsidies have been announced which are designed to hold the line on consumer prices for such staple items as milk and bread.

The Food Prices Review Board established by this parliament is on the alert for any undue profiteering which may be taking place at the retail level, and consumers are asked to co-operate with the board by reporting to it examples of what they consider to be price gouging. Some hon. members have attacked and ridiculed the board, but despite that many members of the special committee were satisfied, following a recent meeting with members of the board, that it is taking its mandate seriously. It is endeavouring to pinpoint problems and to make suitable recommendations to the government based on substantial, valid findings and evidence.

Some members of the special committee have advocated that the Food Prices Review Board should have its powers expanded and enlarged and that it ought to be empowered to roll back prices on its own authority. I continue to oppose that proposal because in my view only the government itself ought to have and to use such powers. It is the government which ought to take full responsibility for the consequences that would result from such action. I am