

be amended to provide, among other things, that the committee examine and report upon—

(g) spreads between prices received by producers and prices paid by consumers.

That particular clause was left in by the C.C.F. when the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre moved his amendment to the amendment that had been moved by the leader of the opposition. In other words, after telling this house that on the basis of the experience of the price spreads committee, it would be two years or more before we could expect any report from this committee, the leader of the C.C.F. group, as well as the leader of the government, was prepared to support—I mean the leader of the opposition—

Mr. GRAYDON: Hear, hear.

Mr. MACKENZIE KING: Well, if my hon. friend gets any satisfaction out of that, let him have it; because it will be a very long time before he will ever have any satisfaction from office.

Mr. GRAYDON: Coming events cast their shadows before.

Mr. MACKENZIE KING: Mr. Speaker, if the word "insincerity" is not unparliamentary, I should like to use it in reference to this particular action on the part of a leader of a party that will denounce the appointment of a committee with power to recommend on questions of spreads between prices received by producers and prices paid by consumers and then, when that has served his purpose, turns around and is prepared to vote with those who are in a party opposite to his own, that the committee be now given the power to report on spreads between prices received by producers and prices paid by consumers.

I hope I have made it plain also that if, as the committee pursues its investigations, it is thought advisable to have its powers enlarged so that it might be given an opportunity to make recommendations with respect to certain matters, the government will be quite prepared to consider any request of that kind at the time it is brought forward. But what we do not wish today, at the present time, is to give any excuse whatsoever to the committee for not devoting its time and attention in a thorough way to the investigation of the rise in prices and the cost of living, which is what we believe the public are most concerned about.

Another argument put forward by hon. members opposite is that I had said, speaking with respect to the price spreads committee when it was before the house—I refer to the

[Mr. Mackenzie King.]

motion to appoint a committee on price spreads in 1934—that under the Combines Investigation Act there was plenty of authority to proceed and to effect a remedy. And because I had said that in 1934 in relation to that particular committee, hon. members opposite say the government should have found enough scope at this time under the Combines Investigation Act to settle this matter of prices.

I thought I made it quite clear that the committee which was dealing with price spreads had before it an entirely different kind of problem from what we have at the present time. We may have certain aspects of that problem to deal with at this time; but at that time what the committee was trying to find out was how it was that on the one hand primary producers were being exploited because the prices they were receiving for what they were selling were being kept down, while, on the other hand, consumers were being exploited by some agencies which were keeping up prices in regard to those very same commodities which they desired to purchase. Somewhere in between there was some force at work which had the effect of accounting for that large spread. The particular kind of organization which would be found in a case like that would be in the nature of what we call a combine or merger, or an association of persons who bound themselves together to serve their own particular ends as against those of producers or consumers. That was the duty of that committee at that time—to investigate mergers, trusts and combines. And naturally, when speaking on that question, I said that there was an act on the statute books dealing with mergers and trusts, and that there was sufficient authority under that act to find out what was necessary to be found out in connection with combines, trusts and mergers.

But here, in present circumstances, we may have many causes of prices being kept up, in which the question of combines does not enter at all. Combines may be one reason for prices rising. But they are not the only reason. The government is seeking today, under the Combines Investigation Act, to find out to what extent mergers, trusts and combines are responsible for this rise in the cost of living. But we cannot stop there. We must look for everything we can discover, affecting the increased cost of living, and once that information has been secured it will not take long for this parliament to meet those conditions by legislation, if they are of a character that can be met by legislation.

The whole question then was, as Mr. Stevens himself made clear when he spoke on his motion, that the committee was ap-