

Increasing Food Prices

ponent of the consumer price index was 137.1 based on 100 for 1961, as compared with 137.4 for all items in the index. In other words, the food component in the cost of living index was slightly less than the average of all components. So now the NDP single out food as the culprit when there were such things as that part of the index defined as services, which stood at 148.5. Why do they not mention the real culprits of the piece instead of singling out farmers every time?

We heard the same kind of unfair argument back in 1965 when food, based on 1949, showed the lowest increase of any major component in the cost of living index. Yet these members spend all their time singling out food as the culprit. It should also be drawn to their attention that the average for the year 1971 food price index was 131.4 on the basis of 100 in 1961, but the index for prices received by farmers in that year was 112.5. Now hon. members complain because farmers are getting a little better deal as a result of action taken by this government, and complaining about it since it is reflected in prices, when in the kind of economy we have it obviously has to finally find its way into the price of food.

An hon. Member: You are building up straw men.

Mr. Olson: I am not building up straw men; I am destroying some, or at least that is what I am trying to do. I have not heard the hon. member for Saint John's East (Mr. McGrath) defend the fishermen, because since this government came to office, for the first time in history fishermen have had some justice in the returns for their products; and that is also included in the food component of the cost of living index. I should think the fishermen would want that position defended rather than have this kind of thing going on.

It has been well established by some hon. members on this side that the portion of the disposable income of Canadians spent on food is the lowest in the world. As was pointed out by the hon. member for Lanark-Renfrew-Carleton (Mr. McBride) only a few minutes ago, it is down to around 17 per cent or 18 per cent in this ratio. What is more important is that it takes less time today for a Canadian, in terms of hours of work, to buy the weekly food basket than for anyone anywhere else in the world.

A comparison can be made as to the number of hours of work in the industrial sector required to buy a basket of mixed foods in various countries. This study has been made. A food basket that contains a wide range of commodities which go into the weekly shopping list can be bought in Canada, on the average, from the proceeds of five hours labour in the industrial sector. That is the lowest number of working hours of any country—and the study included Belgium, Denmark, Italy, Sweden, the United Kingdom, the United States and West Germany, the most advanced industrial countries in the world. In Canada it was five hours; in other countries it was much higher. Even in the United States it was 5.9 hours, and it went up to a high of 24 hours in Italy.

This is the kind of contribution the farmers and the food processing industry have made to Canadian society. In spite of all this, farmers are singled out as being the culprits in the situation we have today. This is dishonest and does a disservice to the farmers of this country, and I

[Mr. Olson.]

believe this kind of hypocrisy ought to be exposed from time to time.

Let me point out what I mean by hypocrisy. I would not be surprised at all that if the opposition had an opportunity next week to move another motion they would say something to the effect that in the opinion of this House the government had failed to cope with the problem of farmers receiving adequate prices for what they produce. The opposition has already done that once or twice. To make things even more confusing, the hon. member for Brandon-Souris exonerated everybody in the processing and distribution chain. There are very expressive words for that kind of stand taken on both sides of the fence, right, left and in the middle all at the same time. The farmers of Canada will understand this because they now have received some justice.

Mr. Woolliams: They will love you.

Mr. Olson: In the last few months there have been increases in the price of some commodities to the farmers of this country. Pork is a good example, as are milk products and fish. If political parties opposite are going to draw public attention to this fact and complain because these people are getting a little more justice in the prices they receive, it is time we exposed this type of hypocrisy.

They complain because there are some people in Canada who have an inadequate diet. Studies have been made from time to time which indicate this is true. What hon. members fail to say is that the inadequacies of a balanced diet, according to experts on nutrition, has very little or nothing to do with the level of income. The hon. member for Essex (Mr. Whelan) pointed out that there are very serious inadequacies in the balanced nutritional diet of many people who can afford to buy all the food they need and, indeed, eat far more than they ought to in total.

That happens to be the fact, but hon. members opposite do not mention it. They weep alligator tears and argue that this is something which must be corrected. We know that hundreds of thousands of Canadians do not eat properly balanced diets, according to nutritional experts, but this is certainly not because the price of food is too high. There is good, wholesome food in Canada in adequate quantities for anybody who chooses to use his disposable income to buy that food.

An hon. Member: What happens to the money?

Mr. Olson: Some of the money goes in some of these other cost of living factors which members across the way do not have the decency to mention. Some of these cost of living factors have gone up 150 per cent.

An hon. Member: Such as government spending.

Mr. Olson: Members of this government recognized long ago that there were some people caught on fixed incomes and that any change in the cost of living had an adverse effect on them in that it lowered their standard of living. That is why in the budget which was brought down a few days ago some very important steps were taken to correct this situation for a large number of Canadians on fixed incomes. This was done by increasing pensions. Many things have been done for the farmer to increase the price