

prices and said that there was a contingency plan. However, I think the record will bear out that the minister was contradicted in this regard, because when the Minister of Agriculture appeared before that same committee he did not seem to be too knowledgeable about a contingency plan. As far as he was concerned, it was something that was just being talked about and was still evolving.

One gets the very distinct and clear impression that the difficulty about it is that the cabinet is split, that the government is divided on this issue, that there is no consensus within the government. This is why the Minister of Agriculture was allowed to spout off idiotic remarks about consumers never having had it so good, about how the people of Canada are spoiled, and food still remaining the best buy, contradicting the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs who has a difficult enough role to play as it is.

This is just about the first anniversary of the first budget of the Minister of Finance and it is interesting to look back to see what the minister said in May one year ago in his budget speech. He said that the government is committed to reasonable price stability, and that they do not expect food prices will rise as fast in 1972 as in 1971, that the current tendency encouraged them in this expectation. Well, Mr. Speaker, in spite of the minister's expectations and all his subsequent remarks, the food index jumped 2.6 per cent to 156.2 per cent in April from 152.2 in March. This compares with average increases of 0.8 per cent between these two months for the five preceding years. There was also a 12.9 per cent rise in food prices since April 1972, with food consumed at home rising 13.3 per cent and restaurant meals up 10.7 per cent from the preceding month of April 1972. Obviously, the Minister of Finance does not have the policies to cope with this problem.

That the government does not know how to deal with the problem becomes increasingly and painfully evident with each passing day. The government is playing for time. It is playing politics with this most crucial and serious issue in Canada, an issue that is bringing hardship to hundreds of thousands of Canadians. The government is playing for time, for some short-lived political gain. I say that this is disgraceful and the sooner the country is rid of this government, the better.

Mr. Jack Cullen (Sarnia-Lambton): Mr. Speaker, once again the hon. member for St. John's East (Mr. McGrath) has not disappointed us. His speech has run true to form. It was the typical hatchet job that he does so well and which we in this House have come to expect.

I know for a fact that the use of the Inquiries Act, which after all is legislation passed by this parliament, in connection with the major recommendation of the special committee on trends in food prices was a quick and immediate response on the part of the minister. The only attack that the hon. member for St. John's East can seem to summon up is the negative one of saying that it is taking a little more time than he thinks is necessary to find the appropriate membership of the board. He fails to recognize that not only do we have to find personnel for the board, but first it must be determined whether we want on the board consumers, chartered accountants or lawyers. Having made that determination, the cabinet can

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then select personnel who in their view will best fit that particular role.

Imagine if you will, Mr. Speaker, that the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs (Mr. Gray) had decided to take the other tack—in other words, not do anything while the House was in recess. The first member who would have risen under Standing Order 43 would have been the hon. member for St. John's East, suggesting that nothing had been done about the food prices committee report. If on the first day the minister had introduced legislation setting up the kind of board he proposes to set up under the Inquiries Act, we would have had the opposition members asking why we did not take action under the Inquiries Act because we could move much quicker. This is the kind of situation where the government side cannot win. If it moves too fast, it is accused of not using legislation that would slow up the process. If it does introduce legislation that would slow up the process, given the heavy amount of work on the order paper, the government would be criticized for moving in this way in order to get out from under the report of the food prices committee.

I was also interested to hear the hon. member say so much about the prices review board when it was his party which rejected out of hand the major recommendation of the committee, despite the fact that it had the support of the Conservative government of Alberta. Their terminology was a "monitoring board", but this review board had the support and backing of the government of Alberta and was a suggestion that government made.

The hon. member who preceded me quoted from a statement prepared by Women Against Soaring Prices, the WASP group, but I did not see him jump to his feet when the same group proposed that the consumers of this country enter into a boycott. He was not so quick then to jump on their bandwagon. In point of fact, he thought that they were wrong at that time. I suggest that the WASP group was wrong on that occasion and that they are wrong now. If you want to set up a board with authority to roll back prices, then I suggest you read some constitutional law.

The hon. member referred to editorial writers in this country, and I am just wondering how many of these editorials he has read. He said the consensus among the editorial writers of this country was that there is no point to a food prices review board being set up under the Inquiries Act. I suggest he and I must read different papers. No doubt he reads Tory ones, whereas I read ones that are objective.

To be fair, editorial opinion on this subject is probably divided. But even those who oppose the setting up of this board under the act at least say we should give it a chance to see if it works. If it is successful with food prices, then it might be a pilot project for dealing with other commodities. Although it is easy in an off-hand way to ridicule, it is difficult to come up with any positive suggestions. I challenge the members of this House to read the speech made by the hon. member for St. John's East and find one positive suggestion that he made during the 20 to 25 minutes he spoke. He did not tell us how they would cope with rising prices.