

Food Prices

Speaker, that this would provide the necessary thrust to lift the Canadian economy out of the unemployment slump in which it now is. That action would put cash into the hands of those who need it most.

Some of us may live in a cashless society, but you still have to lay down hard cash when you buy food in this country. That is where the poor and those on low and fixed incomes are disadvantaged. They do not have the necessary cash. Oh, sure, they buy their television sets on the never-never plan, and they buy their automobile on the never-never plan; but when they go to Dominion, or to Steinberg's, or Loblaw's or any of the food chains of this country, they still have to pay cash, just like everybody else. Actually, they pay a disproportionate amount of their cash for food, because the kind of food they need for their diet has become more expensive. Cheap cuts of meat and hamburger have gone up by 18 per cent. They cannot afford steak. They do not eat it. They cannot afford roast beef; they eat the cheaper cuts of meat, and those cuts have gone up in price to the point where, in some cases, a meat boycott is mandatory because those people just cannot afford to eat meat.

We believe that a temporary 90-day freeze should be imposed on all incomes, that is, on all dividends, fees, wages, salaries, and on all costs and prices except those relating to food at the farm gate. We do not believe that you can impose these kinds of controls on the farmer because when the food leaves the farm and enters the hands of the processor, the inflationary process begins. That is where the inflationary factor begins to work, not at the farm itself.

We believe that during the period of the 90-day freeze the government could find the necessary time to come up with meaningful policies for fighting inflation in this country, inflation that has taken such a tremendously high toll of those on lower and fixed incomes. More important, we believe that if the subsequent hearings of the committee are to be meaningful, if that committee is to be effective, it can only do useful work within the framework of a freeze. That is why we do not support the recommendations, or the major recommendation, of the committee. That is why we, if this motion comes to a vote, will vote against it.

Mr. Gray: Shame.

[Translation]

Mr. Réal Caouette (Témiscamingue): Mr. Speaker, I listened very attentively to the comments of the hon. member for Vancouver-Kingsway (Mrs. MacInnis) as well as to those of the member who just resumed his seat.

Mr. Speaker, since 1948, a few years after the Second World War, we have been hearing in this House complaints and laments from everyone about increases in food prices. We hear suggestions. For instance, two parties believe we should have a minister of consumers who have no money, as is the case now. Unemployed people get a mere pittance, people under social welfare get scraps and they think that the appointment of a minister of consumers would solve the problem.

Mr. Speaker, the only way to solve the problem is to give consumers a way of choosing what they want. That would

[Mr. McGrath.]

be the solution. The member for Vancouver-Kingsway suggests that we should set prices for certain products but not for others, that we should prepare diets to help the Canadian people eat better at lower cost. Mr. Speaker, is it up to a government or a political party to tell consumers what they should eat and should not eat. Should the government decide for the family? Is that what they should do? Should we not try to balance the consumers' purchasing power with industrial and commercial prices, with production prices. Not a word about that. The hon. member for St. John's East said a while ago there was an NDP—Liberal coalition to maintain the present system as it is.

• (1650)

On many occasions, we have submitted the Creditiste solution which is a compensated discount on retail prices following an agreement between the government and the retailers and this not by force but voluntarily. Under this agreement between the government and the retailers, they would grant a 20, 25 or 30 per cent discount on retail prices. Then the consumer would pay 30 per cent less and the retailer would not lose one cent since the discount would be refunded to him by the government.

This solution did not come to the mind of any other political party because we can see the liberal, progressive conservative and NDP coalition. Each time we introduce a motion aimed at improving the consumers' purchasing power, they close ranks against any solution proposed by Creditistes.

Yet they are more than willing to establish all kinds of new gimmicks with a bureaucracy worse than what we now have, to appoint a new minister of Consumers—as I said earlier—even though consumers have no money. Would this solve the problem? No!

Let us tamper with anything, let us attack business, the distributor, everybody but not the financial system which is sacred! Let us keep on imposing all kinds of taxes under the pretense of relieving the consumer. But exactly the opposite is happening.

Since 1948, prices have been increasing be it for food or anything else. Instead of subsidizing the consumer to buy products, we subsidize the producer to produce more to the point where we have an extraordinary volume of products of all kinds and consumers without purchasing power.

This is no solution, but what is suggested? Price controls. What would that do? Exactly what they did when we had controls. At that time, I was operating a small grocery and prices as well as on many of the products we were entitled to have. We were using ration coupons and we could not buy more than prescribed by these coupons and at controlled prices.

Mr. Speaker, there was also at that time the 2 cent discount on the quart of milk. But what did price controls give us? Black market. And this black market was not only practiced by big wicked financiers, big wicked producers or big wicked industries. Not at all. There was black market even within our cooperatives.