

Food Prices

not project the sort of crusading image which I and my party believe is necessary to give the consumers of Canada the governmental service and concern to which they are entitled.

I now wish to say a brief word or two about the Food Prices Review Board. The minister, of course, did give them a hard time in obtaining staff. Last Tuesday he attempted to suggest that they were acting independently of him. He neglected to say that ten of his senior departmental officials are in fact supervising the 80 investigators who are going around the country making investigations into the reasons for food price increases.

Of course, the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) last September 4, presumably with the minister's knowledge, refused to bring in legislation giving either the board or the government the power to eliminate any abuses respecting unjustified price increases. The minister is not being totally consistent in his approach to the board. On the one hand he tries to stress their independence and power; on the other hand he refuses or is unable to convince the cabinet of the necessity to give them increased powers to do something about the increases in the price of food. I think the sooner we have a clear and articulate statement on the government's position with respect to the Food Prices Review Board, and not any window-dressing in terms of a bogus expansion in the terms of reference, as announced by the Prime Minister on August 13, the better off we will all be.

Now I am going to put the motion that I referred to at the outset of my remarks. I do this in a spirit of co-operation with the members on the other side of the House and with the members to my left. In this motion we are not going to pin the terms of reference or the instruction to the committee down to any specific proposal or amendment that was discussed at an earlier time in Committee. Merely, we are saying that when the committee considered its recommendations in the second report presented to the House in July, a certain set of economic conditions existed.

● (2020)

There was a certain set of premises by which we were all proceeding. Then things changed rapidly in the month of August. It was not just the consumer price index that changed; that is merely the manifestation of the over-all problem which many of us did not realize was so serious. I am willing to bet that members from all parties might not have been willing to stick with the recommendations of the second report had that factual information as manifested in the consumer price index figures of August been available.

In that spirit of co-operation, Mr. Speaker, I propose that this report not be concurred in tonight, that it be sent back to committee and that members from all parties have an opportunity, with this new factual information, to bring forward such recommendations, such reconsiderations, rethought-out policies, rethought-out statements and summaries of facts that occur to them under these new conditions. We should not at this time, in this House, in this period of crisis, be saddled with what are really lukewarm, wishy-washy recommendations which we sup-

[Mr. Atkey.]

port for the most part but which really do not come to grips with the over-all problems.

I therefore move, seconded by the hon. member for Kent-Essex (Mr. Danforth):

That the second report of the Special Committee on Trends in Food Prices be not now concurred in but be referred back to the said committee with an instruction to consider the relevance and effect, if any, of the movements of the several main components of the consumer price index for Canada for August, 1973, as domestic factors accounting for the trends in food prices in Canada, and to make any revisions thereby necessitated in the said report for presentation to this House as quickly as possible.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. member for St. Paul's (Mr. Atkey) was good enough earlier in his address to indicate to the Chair the amendment which he proposed to move, and in this way he gave the Chair an opportunity to consider the procedural acceptability of his motion. I suppose the hon. member did that because he suspected there were procedural difficulties in relation to his amendment. If he did, he was correct.

I certainly do not propose to make a ruling now. I am quite willing to hear the views of hon. members who may wish, for the next hour or so, to instruct the Chair on their belief as to the rules, the precedents and citations which might be applicable to the amendment proposed by the hon. member for St. Paul's. Although I am quite prepared at the present time to make a ruling, I would not want to deprive hon. members of the pleasure of embarking upon a procedural discussion.

Mr. Atkey: Just briefly, Mr. Speaker. No doubt Your Honour is aware of a ruling made by the Deputy Speaker prior to the supper hour. Without attempting to reflect in any way upon that ruling, I think it now constitutes a precedent of the House and I might wish to make submissions on its applicability to this particular motion.

I do not have a written copy of the ruling before me, of course, but as I recall his words the Deputy Speaker seemed to indicate that because this was a motion for concurrence on the second interim report of a special committee, and because the special committee continues to exist and in fact has the option of submitting a third or fourth report, therefore the earlier amendment to consider other new matters was for that reason unacceptable to the Chair.

The procedural argument I would make in this context, Your Honour, is that this motion does not necessarily attempt to introduce a specific new topic which might well be the subject of a third report. It merely attempts to suggest that the factual basis upon which the recommendations of the second report were made have changed so drastically that at the moment, in the best interests of all hon. members of this House, the committee should reconsider its recommendations in light of that new factual evidence which has become available to members of the House and the public subsequent to the formulation and the making of the recommendations in the second report.

Mr. Caccia: May I ask a question, Your Honour?

Mr. Speaker: Is the hon. member rising to ask a question on the point of order?