

The Address—Mr. Lewis

Canadian people generally. Further, if we did that it would be possible to ensure that the money was actually used for expansion and job creation rather than simply fattening the assets of the corporate giants in this country.

I refer hon. members of the House to the Gray report. They ought to read it and reread it. I say this to members of both the government party and of the official opposition. I refer them to that part of the report which states that 44 per cent of the funds used for the expansion of foreign-controlled firms in Canada from 1960 to 1967 was obtained through accelerated capital cost allowances. I ask, how much longer are we going to offer foreign-controlled firms the means to buy us out with our own money?

At last, the government has indicated a long overdue concern about the rising price of food. Last fall the Prime Minister said rising food prices were good for the farmers. Apparently the farmers, along with millions of other Canadians, were unimpressed by this argument. The government's decision to establish a parliamentary committee to study food prices indicates that although the Prime Minister may not know what is good for the farmer, he knows what is good for his government.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Speaker, I am always surprised at the extent of the research the government devotes to the food industry. It has always washed its hands of it. Even last summer, the Department of Consumer and Corporate Affairs blamed the higher prices on the producer while the Department of Agriculture published a newsrelease according to which the processors and retailers—and not the farmers—were to blame.

Every week, Mr. Speaker, full page advertisements in all the newspapers across the land claim that the supermarkets make modest profits, such as 0.6, 1 or 1.5 per cent on their sales. Only when one studies their profits as compared to their investments, that is according to the method used by the other industries in calculating their profits, do we see their miserable profits of 0.6 per cent, as in the case of Dominion Stores Limited, for instance, become in reality 11 per cent, that is, a far more reasonable income, whatever the point of view. It could well be that it is—

[*English*]

—“mainly because of the meat,” Mr. Speaker!

We do not believe that the proposed parliamentary committee is an adequate substitute for a prices review board with power to roll back and control food prices. We do not fool ourselves about that. However, this parliamentary committee might be a useful start, but only if it is set up without delay and if it is given wide and full powers to call witnesses, to require the production of documents and to examine the books of processors and distributors. We call upon the government to establish the committee immediately and to give it the necessary powers.

Food is an important part of the cost of living, particularly for Canadians on pensions, on welfare and on low incomes generally. These people deserve better. The action proposed in the throne speech is minimal. Delay would be inexcusable. In our view, the committee should not be burdened with members from the other place except, Mr. Speaker, for those Senators who may wish to

[*Mr. Lewis.*]

testify in their capacity as directors of various corporations.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Lewis: Mr. Speaker, somebody a little less kind than I am has said that perhaps the Senators might be interested in doing something about the increasing price of Geritol.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Lewis: The other major factor in the cost of living of the average Canadian family is that of shelter. There are some brave words in the throne speech on the subject of housing, but what exactly will they mean in practice? If they mean no more than the proposals we received in the last parliament, then the government and CMHC are still failing to tackle adequately this urgent problem.

I note particularly the omission of any reference to lower interest rates, and the gentleness of the appeal for more mortgage money from investors. In our view, parliament has the authority and should act to require banks and other institutions to invest a certain proportion of their reserves in housing and to lower interest rates on mortgages. The need for decent homes grows greater every passing year. I plead with the government to use its opportunity to make a bold and effective start now.

A careful study of the Speech from the Throne shows some very important and desirable suggestions in the field of social policy. But it also contains some wording and some aspects which arouse doubts and worries. For many years our party has advocated a floor, under income, for all Canadians or, as it is now called, a guaranteed annual income. We are, therefore, pleased to see the acceptance of this principle, at least as far as concerns those who cannot work, the aged and the incapacitated. But I wonder what the somewhat unusual language with respect to pensioners is meant to convey. The throne speech says, “legislation will be introduced to improve the economic situation of old age pensioners”. We will wait anxiously to see precisely what these words mean. All I want to say at this point is that failure to increase basic pensions, or the government merely presenting a token increase, will not be acceptable to members of the New Democratic Party. I am sure that such action will not be acceptable to many other members of this House nor to the people of Canada.

• (2020)

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Lewis: We shall also watch carefully the proposed changes in the unemployment insurance plan. We appreciate that there has been some abuse of the program, and we do not condone such abuse any more than any other section of this House does; nor do we oppose appropriate measures to tighten the administration, so long as they do not hurt the innocent.

What we regret, Mr. Speaker, is that already, as a result of the measures taken by the Minister of Manpower and Immigration (Mr. Andras) in tightening some of the rules, we have received complaints, indeed cries for help from unemployed Canadians clearly entitled to benefit who