

Mr. McGrath: Yes, there is conflict of interest. Perhaps we would then have a Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs who represents the best interests of the consumers of this country.

The fifth recommendation reads:

That the federal government, in co-operation with the various provincial governments, consider the feasibility of co-sponsored programs to get proper food on the tables of people with low income.

Who would quarrel with that recommendation? Everybody supports it. Anyone who has read the nutritional report of the Department of National Health and Welfare, which I think was called Nutrition Canada, and the report of the Senate Committee on Poverty, would be struck by the serious nutritional problem in this country. In this land of affluence there are families that are undernourished because of improper diet—not underfed but undernourished. There is no doubt that in areas of the country there is a need for dietary supplements. It is not necessary to have federal-provincial agreement on this because the provinces would welcome the initiative of the federal government in this regard.

Mr. Speaker, the sixth recommendation is the subject of procedural argument today and I subscribe to that notwithstanding the fact that it may have procedural limitations. As the minister's office is now constituted it is totally ineffective; the minister does not have the power to act, does not seem to have the resources to act and does not seem to have the heart or willingness to act. Perhaps we need to reread the legislation setting up the Department of Consumer and Corporate Affairs and governing the conduct of the minister. We subscribe to this recommendation and in committee played a major role in having it incorporated in the report. We do not subscribe to an ineffective Prices Review Board which would in no way solve the problem of the rising trends in food prices. If there is a trend it is the continuing increases in the cost of food.

What do we recommend, Mr. Speaker? As a first step, we recommend a 90-day across-the-board freeze. If anyone wants to argue about the effectiveness of a freeze, I would recommend that they study the effects of the freeze in the United Kingdom and in the United States and that they compare the increases in the cost of living in these countries to our own. They would come to the conclusion that a freeze is and can be effective. We believe that a freeze is necessary first of all in order to halt the spiralling increase in the cost of food which is a direct result of the anticipation of some kind of government action in one instance.

Another factor of course, is world market conditions. We believe that a freeze is necessary because the government would then be able to consult with the provinces who have tremendous jurisdiction in this area. For example, there could be consultation in the area of rents and other areas which are directly under provincial jurisdiction. There has to be federal-provincial co-operation. In consultation with the provinces, given the freeze and given the necessary power to work out the necessary mechanism, the government could devise a truly effective prices review board, one that would not recommend action through the minister but one that would have

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power to take effective action. That is where we quarrel with the major recommendation of this report. The hon. member for Vancouver-Kingsway can argue all she wants. The fact is that the committee is recommending the establishment of an agency which would be no more effective, probably less effective, than the Prices and Incomes Commission.

• (1640)

An hon. Member: Nonsense.

Mr. McGrath: Well, all you need to do is read the recommendation. It says that the government "give consideration to the advisability of introducing the necessary legislation to establish an independent Food Prices Review Board equipped with such powers as are necessary . . .". Necessary to do what? To review prices, I suggest. Ask any housewife in the country; she can review prices for you. She reviews them week after week as she goes to the supermarket and sees the weekly increase in the price of basic and staple food items. There you have the best review board in the country. I submit the consumers of this country are looking for action, and not for the sort of thing recommended here. They are looking for real action.

The boycotts in the long run will not be effective; they cannot be effective. The boycotts, nevertheless, are a manifestation of widespread consumer unrest in this country over the high cost of food and high cost of living. The government should pay heed to those boycotts and consider them for what they are, a manifestation of unrest.

What is this review board mentioned in the recommendations called upon to do? In addition to being given powers to review prices, it is to report to the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs. Then, the first recommendation reads:

In its report to the Minister, the Board could make recommendations concerning appropriate action to be taken.

What kind of appropriate action would be recommended? The government would not have to take such action. Given our present parliamentary situation, if that review board recommended that there be a freeze on wages, salaries and incomes in the country, do you think that such a recommendation would be supported by the NDP? Of course not! Consequently, if this board is to be effective and placed outside the realm of partisan political influence, it should be given powers to act on its own. We maintain that such a board could conceivably result from a freeze but, first, there should be a freeze. Then, the mechanism could be devised. That mechanism could result in an effective instrument being created and not in the ineffective sort of recommendations of this report.

We also look at this matter in the broader context. We feel that there should be a reversal of present economic, monetary and fiscal policies of this government. The government should introduce a real expansionist program. It should cut back certain sales taxes, particularly the sales tax on food, which is especially hard on Canadians with lower incomes. There should be a general reduction in such taxes. A case could be made for a general reduction in unnecessary government expenditures. We believe, Mr.