

and basic, the industry works hard at keeping this aspect of its merchandising from the public.

The time has come when this aspect of chain store control should no longer be kept from the public. This government should make up its mind once and for all on which side of the fence it is. Is it on the side of the 95 corporations that have so far been trying to keep it in office? Or is it going henceforth to be on the side of the people who for five years have been pleading with the government to launch an investigation into the operations of food chains, with the hold that they have on food prices and on the lives of people across this country?

This is one of the major problems with which the government should be grappling, and it must launch such an investigation if it is to show any concern at all for families, elderly people, people who are sick as well as ordinary people on low and moderate incomes in this country. It is for this reason that we move this want of confidence motion today, at a time when it is still not too late for the government to act. Let me tell the government that if it is at all interested in coming back in any strength after the forthcoming election, and before it has managed to alienate the consumer who is still so completely influenced by chain store brainwashing, it had better pay heed to what we request in the following motion:

That, in the opinion of this House, the government has failed to cope with the problem of steadily rising food prices, which seriously affect Canadian living standards, or with the fact that supermarket profits have increased simultaneously at an unprecedented rate, and because these matters are of nation-wide concern they should be referred immediately to a Special Committee of this House for investigation and report by June 26, 1972.

My colleagues will follow up with other aspects of this control over our lives on the part of the supermarkets, but in closing may I make one final plea on behalf of those people of this country who are so defenceless, those who feel they are up against a faceless government that does not care and will do nothing to help them in their great need. I urge the government, if for no reason other than to show that they do have some humanity, to do what we request and send this question to a special committee that will hear witnesses, so that there can be full disclosure of the facts before Parliament adjourns.

**Mr. James A. McGrath (St. John's East):** Mr. Speaker, we have no difficulty supporting the motion before the House, though we do have some difficulty trying to reconcile the method employed by the hon. member to give effect to her motion. I shall have more to say about that later on.

I should like to express my concern at the outset at the absence from the House of the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs (Mr. Andras) and his Parliamentary Secretary. The minister was here during the course of the oral question period, and I assume that it must be business of a most urgent nature to cause him to be absent from the House during this debate, the subject matter of which goes right to the root of the minister's portfolio.

**Mr. Dinsdale:** There is nothing more urgent than this.

**Mr. McGrath:** As my hon. friend has just said, we can imagine nothing more urgent than the subject matter of the motion that is now before the House. Having com-

### *Increasing Food Prices*

mented that the minister is absent and that he probably has an excuse for his absence, one wonders where his parliamentary secretary is since he, too, is absent today. Surely, his function should be to represent the minister in a debate of this nature if, in the course of pursuing his responsibilities, the minister himself must be absent.

I notice too that the former Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs, now Minister of State for Urban Affairs (Mr. Basford), is also absent. I find this difficult to understand since I know of his great and continuing interest in the consumer and the subject before the House today. I understand that the Minister of State who speaks on financial matters will be replying on behalf of the government, so we shall listen to what he has to say with a great deal of interest. I do hope that the absence today from the debate of the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs has nothing to do with his new responsibility as co-chairman of the national Liberal campaign. One wonders just exactly where the interest of the present minister lies, whether in the cause of the consumer and the responsibilities that he has as Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs, or whether in attending to the national campaign responsibilities of the Liberal party. We hope that the minister will honour us with his presence today and, perhaps will condescend to make a contribution to the debate on a matter that is of great concern to Canadians in all parts of the country.

• (1550)

The hon. member who introduced the motion referred to the report of the joint Committee of the House of Commons and the Senate which was set up in 1966 and made its report in 1967. I am sure other hon. members will have more to say about that, but I think it is important to note that it was as a consequence of the report of that joint committee the Department of Consumer and Corporate Affairs came into existence and some of the consumer legislation we now have on the books materialized. Reference has also been made to the report of the Batten royal commission on the cost of food in the three prairie provinces. This royal commission also took a considerable amount of time to arrive at its conclusions and recommendations. I think it took almost two years to conduct its study of food prices in the three prairie provinces.

It is in this regard that we have some difficulty with the motion now before the House, the spirit of which we are in total agreement. It calls for setting up a special committee of the House of Commons to examine into and report by June 26 upon the subject of increased food prices and increases in supermarket profits. Assuming this motion were to be accepted and the government agreed to set up such a committee of the House, the provisions of Standing Order 42(1) would have to come into effect, which would mean another delay of 48 hours or two full sitting days. Even at that, the motion would be a debatable one, so presumably there would be a full day's debate before setting up the committee. This would not leave much more than two weeks for the committee to examine into the whole subject of increases in the cost of food and an alleged corresponding increase in supermarket profits.

If this motion were accepted by the House, during those two weeks this special committee would have to hear witnesses from all across the country, because this prob-