

Increasing Food Prices

spending. Therefore, it is my intention to move an amendment. I will read it now because I may make some remarks on it. I wish to move the following amendment to the motion, pursuant to Standing Order 58(4)(a):

Adding after the word rate, in the said motion:

"and/or with the fact that transportation costs have increased substantially and at an uncontrolled, unprecedented rate,"

and the remainder of the motion shall remain the same.

The motion, therefore, would read as follows:

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/or with the fact that transportation costs have increased substantially and at an uncontrolled, unprecedented rate, and because these matters are of nationwide concern they should be referred immediately to a special committee of this House for investigation and report by June 26, 1972.

This afternoon the hon. member for St. John's East (Mr. McGrath) moved a motion. It was pointed out that there are two prongs to the main motion. It was set out in the ruling that another prong could be added to the motion, although it could not substantially change the wording from "the standing committee" to "the Prices and Incomes Commission". I listened to the ruling this afternoon. One of the ingredients which must be taken into consideration by anyone studying the high cost of food is the high cost of transportation. I now ask that this third prong be put into the motion. I trust that my friends in the New Democratic Party will see their way clear not only to support us on the procedure but on the specifics of the amendment.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Laniel): Order, please. Reading the amendment, I have some reservation about accepting it. At first glance it seems to bring in a completely new matter. Because we have had already a procedural debate on a previous amendment, and because of the time element, without creating any precedent I will accept the amendment at this time. I could not make a decision to disallow the amendment without allowing hon. members to comment from a procedural point of view. This would deny an hon. member from the party which moved the motion the opportunity to close the debate, because there are only 15 minutes remaining. I will put the motion if the hon. member will inform the Chair who is the seconder.

Mr. Woolliams: The hon. member for St. John's East.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Laniel): The hon. member for St. John's East, having spoken, cannot second the motion.

Mr. Woolliams: Then the hon. member for Lambton-Kent (Mr. McCutcheon) will second the motion.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Laniel): The hon. member for Calgary North (Mr. Woolliams), seconded by the hon. member for Lambton-Kent (Mr. McCutcheon), moves the following amendment:

Adding after the word rate, in the said motion:

[Mr. Woolliams.]

"and/or with the fact that transportation costs have increased substantially and at an uncontrolled, unprecedented rate,"

and the remainder of the motion shall remain the same.

Mr. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa-Whitby): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to wind up the debate on this very important motion. After listening to government spokesmen today it would be almost impossible for someone who did not know the topic in advance to know what we were supposed to be debating. At different times they talked about labour costs and the nutritional habits of Canadians. Indeed, one member on the government side spent all his time talking about food costs in Sweden. This either illustrates the stupidity of the Liberal party of Canada or merely their incompetence to interpret a motion. I ask Your Honour to judge which is worse for a party that claims to have the right to govern this country. It was an incredible performance.

• (2130)

I have before me the final report of the Special Joint Committee of the Senate and the House of Commons on Consumer Credit, dated April 25, 1967, signed by the co-chairmen, Senator David A. Croll and the former minister of consumer and corporate affairs, the hon. member for Vancouver Centre (Mr. Basford). In that report the hon. gentlemen have something to say about the food processing industry and the supermarkets which in our humble way we thought merited serious analysis today in terms of their effect on food prices in this country. In the concluding statement of the report the committee says:

The domination of a few large corporations in some sectors of the Canadian economy is clearly evident and gives rise to the question, "Is this in the public interest?" Your committee feels that the implications of this question must be fully examined.

This followed an analysis of the way in which relatively few companies in this country dominate the food industry. The report is an expression of concern by the committee, one dominated, I stress, by Liberals. The committee goes on to recommend a continuing investigation into the monopolistic practices of the food industry in Canada. Needless to say, this recommendation has not been adopted in the slightest way by the government. Indeed, the government never had any serious intention of dealing with the issue.

Reflect on the speeches we have heard today from the other side. Has one Liberal member risen and said he is seriously concerned about the market power of the supermarkets? They have managed to talk about everything but the subject before the House for debate. In the time available to me I should like to say something about the motion before us. First I should like to say something about supermarket profits. I shall name the companies and put on record their profits from 1968. Take Steinberg's. In 1968 its profits were \$6.4 million; in 1969, \$5 million; in 1970, \$9.3 million and in 1971, \$9.5 million.

Mr. Stafford: How much did they have invested?

Mr. Broadbent: I will deal later with that question. The net income of this firm for a 24-week period ending January 15, 1971, was \$3.7 million. One year later, for the same period ending January 15, 1972, net income amounted to