

Food Prices

back until something like a comparable price can be charged Canadian consumers. This means, in turn, that the fish which used to be regarded as a substitute for meat by the poor people of British Columbia has spiralled in cost away out of sight—and fish is about our best protein source in British Columbia, or has been until now. An interesting thing is that around August 16 a small number of 7¼ ounce cans of salmon was released to the wholesalers at a price of \$50 for 24 pounds, which comes to \$2.08 a pound. It is also stated in this article.

A top official in the federal fisheries service here said the government is powerless to stop the export of fish at the expense of the domestic market.

I should like to ask, if we can have a two-price system for oil, domestic and foreign, why can we not have a two-price system as well for British Columbia salmon? If we can have export controls for beef and pork from the Prairies, why can we not have a two-price system for salmon in British Columbia? These fish are caught in British Columbia waters, and we had a record run this year. What do our federal government officials mean when they say the federal government is powerless to act, when they know this is going on?

An hon. Member: There is something fishy.

Mrs. MacInnis (Vancouver Kingsway): You bet there is something fishy when this federal government allows a statement of that kind to be made. These two companies control between 85 per cent and 90 per cent of canned salmon in British Columbia and Alaska, and therefore are in a position to determine the price. If export prices are higher, they will sell to Japan and Britain. As a result, there will be a shortage in Canada and the prices will be at such a level that only the wealthy can buy salmon in Canada.

There was an interesting clipping in the *Globe and Mail* of August 10 which stated that for the 24-week period ending June 17 this year—and that was before the big run came in—sales of salmon by B.C. Packers were up by 25 per cent and its profits were up 124 per cent. I say that this is gouging the consumer and this sort of thing should be stopped.

I have only a couple of minutes left so I shall suggest what should be done. First, the sooner we get rid of these snoopers and put the money being used for this purpose by the Prices Review Board to something useful, the better. Secondly, I think we must have a Prices Review Board with some teeth. There is no advantage in the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs (Mr. Gray) and the government thinking they can pull the wool over the eyes of the consumer any longer. People are getting wise and know that a token board is not much good. Thirdly, the Prices Review Board must open the books of these companies and make known to the public what these companies are doing and who controls them. Fourthly, I think the government should put export controls on B.C. salmon in order to keep enough within Canada for our people at a price they can afford to pay.

My fifth point is that we must impose an excess profits tax in respect of these companies which are increasing their profits by 124 per cent while increasing their sales by 25 per cent. Lastly, I think we must get down to a study of

[Mrs. MacInnis (Vancouver Kingsway).]

who controls the fishing companies. When we do, I think we will find the great Weston empire underlying at least one of the two dominant fishing companies on the west coast.

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As my leader said when he spoke last week regarding the realm of corporate profits, "This is an area that only New Democrats are willing to attack, but it is a crucial area". We must get down to the attack in the area of controlling our means of life and the many items which make up the nutritious diet needed by the people of this country. The sooner we get around to it, the sooner will the people of this country have faith in the power of the government to do something about the soaring prices which are inflicted on them today unreasonably and with no justification.

Mr. Bert Hargrave (Medicine Hat): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to take part in this debate because, first of all, I have been a member of the Special Committee on Trends in Food Prices. Although I have not attended all meetings of the committee, I have been present at most of the hearings. First of all I should like to make a few general comments about the hearings I have been privileged to attend as a member. I must say that during the early meetings the collective feeling of members seemed to be that it would perhaps be only a matter of time before the villain or the rip-off segment of the food industry would be exposed as we proceeded from one witness to another and that, hopefully, the next witness would be the culprit or the fall guy who, because of illegal or excessive procedures and profits, was perhaps responsible for all our record high food costs.

Of course, it was not that easy. The committee brought forth its first report with its principal recommendation being that of a prices review board. Then just prior to the second report of the committee which we are debating tonight the thinking and direction seemed to change significantly, with most of the committee members realizing that there was no single scapegoat to be found and crucified in our deliberations and that, just maybe, North American and world demand—supply patterns had a great deal to do with the Canadian cost of living and especially food cost issues.

A good number of caustic and satirical comments have been made by members of the press, members of parliament and Canadians as a whole about the usefulness of this special committee. I think a good many of these no doubt were justified, especially in the early stages of our hearings. Now, almost in retrospect, as we debate the second report of the committee I suggest that one of the most valuable and perhaps unexpected results of all the committee's deliberations is a much better total understanding of our entire food industry, hopefully, by all Canadians. I hope we appreciate that.

Tonight I wish to address myself particularly to recommendations Nos. 8 and 9 as these two deal very specifically with the long-range agricultural production side of this question. I think it is important that I read these recommendations:

8. Because an adequate supply of essential food is vital, the committee recommends that the federal government consider the