

### *Increasing Food Prices*

always been poor, and advancing age magnifies their problems because they are less able to support themselves adequately. There is an increase in the need for such services as taxis, drugs, medical and dental care, and hospitalization or home nursing care. As consumers, the elderly are further crippled by these extra demands on their already inadequate incomes.

Buying food is the major difficulty faced by the poor. This is their largest and most regular outlay. The object should be to buy economical foods which will provide a reasonably balanced and nutritious diet. But, handicapped by the lack of information and mobility, the poor tend to concentrate too heavily on cheaper, starchy foods to the neglect of protein and vitamin-enriched foods; or they may buy the more easily accessible, expensively processed and packaged foods.

This, again, underscores the dilemma of our times. While we are putting a larger portion of the food dollar into the packaging and marketing of foods, the advantage goes to the better-to-do and those who wish to have more free time in which to enjoy the pleasures of our society and culture. It means there are fewer economically priced food products on the market.

Turning to another aspect, I think it should be pointed out that the low prices received by farmers in this whole food production and consumption cycle are sometimes, to a great extent, the fault of farmers themselves.

Egg producers, for example, have been getting an extremely low income lately and many of them, especially in Ontario, have suffered severe financial loss. However, the problem has arisen partly because the egg producers themselves have been unable to get together. Every other segment of our society organizes itself and is thereby able to lay claim to a larger slice of the economic pie. This has not been true of farmers; farmers have not organized themselves as well as they ought. I again make an appeal which I have made many times in this House before, for farmers to organize themselves and get the larger portion of the Canadian dollar which is their due.

The question which really ought to be before us this afternoon is: Should Canada have low-priced food? If the answer is yes, we must then ask ourselves on whose shoulders the effect of these low prices rest; should it be on the shoulders of the farmers only, or should it be spread more generally throughout the community?

I ask myself whether it would not be better to establish a minimum income level for all Canadians, thus avoiding the situation in which too many food producers are forced to accept a sub-minimal or mini-income. Many farmers speak to me in somewhat bitter tones. They feel governments are more interested in the large segments of voters who are located in the cities and towns—that they are not prepared to listen to farmers. Yet the record of legislation of governments, certainly the present one, would refute that contention.

I believe the government must avoid getting into the position of being either for the farmers or for the consumers. It is not a question of farmers versus consumers. Farmers must be in a position where they can expect a reasonable income from an occupation which is honourable and valuable. The government should be concerned that there are not two victims here—those who are poor and who suffer because of high food prices, and farmers who are not getting a proper return for their labour. It seems to me the best advice I could give, since food is already being produced very economically, would be that

[Mr. McBride.]

farmers organize themselves to take a better place in the marketplace, thereby ensuring themselves of a fairer return.

**Mr. R. Gordon L. Fairweather (Fundy-Royal):** Mr. Speaker, this motion in the name of the hon. member for Vancouver-Kingsway (Mrs. MacInnis) has resulted in an interesting debate on an important subject; but the motion has been spoiled, for me, in at least two ways. I do not think it is really within the realm of practicality to expect that a special committee could report on this issue in a useful way by June 26. It is not in the nature of the study which would have to be made. In the second place, it is not the supermarkets which are responsible for this entire problem—I admit the resolution does not say they are—although they are, perhaps, a convenient whipping-boy.

In my opinion, the remarks of some of my colleagues who have taken part in the debate were spoiled, if I may say so, by a convenient and lazy resort to slogans. In a way, slogans spice the language of debate but they do not make for clarity of discussion. I really do get tired of hearing terms such as “corporate elite”, “big business” and other hackneyed shibboleths which really throw no light on the difficulty we are facing.

The issue we are discussing here is, surely, the cost of food. Another area of concern is the small share of the price which accrues to the primary producer. We have heard some interesting comments from both sides of the House about the increase in productivity of the farmer. A further consideration is the disparity between food costs in various parts of Canada. I shall discuss this aspect in a minute or so. Then there is a subsidiary issue which is very much in the minds of some of us lately, the attempt on the part of the government to negotiate wage contracts on the basis of regional rather than national wage scales.

I should like to call attention to an interesting juxtaposition of articles which comment on this trend. In today's *Globe and Mail* appears a news story that has already been alluded to. A special survey has been conducted showing a wide spread in prices between the Atlantic area and Ontario. The Canadian Press report reads as follows:

• (2020)

Montreal and Toronto, Canada's largest urban centres, have the lowest retail food prices in the country—

The basis for this statement is the annual special survey of retail prices conducted by Statistics Canada. The article continues:

The survey found that food prices in Montreal and Toronto were one per cent less than in Winnipeg. But food prices in St. John's, Newfoundland and in Halifax were 9 per cent more, making for a 10 per cent spread over Montreal and Toronto prices.

Then follows some additional interesting data to be found in the special survey on retail prices. Curiously enough, in today's *Ottawa Journal* we find an article headed “Reversing an old trend; civil service moving toward regional salary rate system”. The article reads in part:

More and more, the trend in public service pay is away from a flat national scale to regional rates.—

Then follows a report of a discussion with the President of the Treasury Board (Mr. Drury) in which he makes