

inflation and rising prices. On a number of occasions, we asked the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs to outline the government's guidelines for areas within federal jurisdiction or the government guidelines to be imposed upon the proposed prices review board.

Today, Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs said that he announced government policy in this regard and the guidelines when he made his statement on April 27. I read that statement. Nowhere can I find in it any reference to government policy with regard to food prices or the cost of living. Nowhere can I find in it any reference to government guidelines for the new prices review board. In the news stories covering the press conference of April 27, when the minister made this announcement, we are again left in the dark. There is no reference whatsoever to exactly what the government policy is in this regard.

It is interesting to reflect on the circumstances surrounding the announcement by the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs. He chose to make his announcement in the midst of the Easter Recess when parliament was not in session. What is even more difficult to understand, he made his statement coincidentally with the closing of a major federal-provincial conference in Ottawa on welfare. I am sure this announcement was made in the hope that the half-hearted attempt to meet the consensus of the food prices committee, and the growing fears in the country, would be obscured by the statement closing the federal-provincial conference on welfare. That is the only conclusion we can reach.

Mr. Gray: Will the hon. member accept a question?

Mr. McGrath: I am sure the minister will be participating in this debate. My time is limited. I am sure the minister will be able to ask all the questions he wants when I finish my speech. I am sure the minister hoped his announcement on his half-hearted attempt to meet the demands of the food prices committee and half-hearted attempt to meet the New Democratic Party half way would be obscured by the news flowing from this federal-provincial conference on welfare. That must surely be the explanation as to why the minister elected to make his statement at the time when the House was not sitting. Subsequent events have shown there was certainly no urgency.

The minister was trying to say he was treating this matter as one of great urgency. He could have at least waited one more week until parliament was in session and made his statement in the House, thereby allowing the members of this House to respond to the action the government was taking. But no, Mr. Speaker, the minister elected not to take that course. There is a good reason for that. The minister knew that the statement he made on April 27 setting up the prices review board would not be acceptable in this House and would not stand up to the scrutiny of this House. That is why he elected to make this statement when the House was not sitting. The committee recommended and I quote:

The Committee recommends:

1. 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

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necessary to review prices, and that it report to the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs. In its reports to the Minister, the Board could make recommendations concerning appropriate action to be taken.

The government does not intend to introduce legislation in this House. It does not intend to bring this review board into the House in any way, shape or form. Instead, they circumvent the House by using the provisions of the Inquiries Act to establish this commission. If the government had shown enough courage to meet the recommendations of the committee and to bring legislation before the House something might have been said for it, but the government knows full well it would have been faced with amendments and that these amendments would, at the very least, have had the effect of putting some teeth into the useless board whose establishment is proposed.

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Given the situation in which parliament finds itself, the minister knows that the proposed review board, as announced by the minister on April 27, will not be acceptable and that hon. members would, by way of amendment, have considerably strengthened the board in fulfilment of their commitments and responsibilities. As a consequence, no legislation has been introduced. The board is to be set up under the Inquiries Act. What will it do? The provisions of the Inquiries Act will give the board no more power than could be exercised by the Special Committee on Trends in Food Prices. The commissioners will be able to call for papers and persons and examine witnesses. That was precisely the role of the special committee. Obviously there is no future for the special committee, because the special committee is now redundant by virtue of the minister's action.

But even allowing for all the limitations and shortcomings of the review board, surely there must be people in Canada who could be approached to serve on the board. Until yesterday not one Canadian had been approached. Nobody had been invited to participate in this work. No invitation had been extended to any Canadian asking him to chair this board. One wonders what has become of all the expertise which I am sure must be lying around in the bureaucracy of Ottawa left over from the Prices and Incomes Commission. One wonders, in particular, why Dr. Young was not called upon. After all, he must have amassed considerable experience during his tenure as chairman of the Prices and Incomes Commission. I submit he was not consulted because, as a result of his experience, he has reached the conclusion that only some form of income control would effectively halt inflation in Canada. And this, as we all know, would prove embarrassing to the government.

There has been an adverse reaction across the country to the minister's statement. We know it is not acceptable to most of the consumer groups. I refer, for example, to a release by the Women Against Soaring Prices. In a brief dated May 2, this body expressed its views as follows:

Government guidelines for this Board are incomplete and unsatisfactory. Dependence upon "investigation and publicity" just is not powerful enough to deal with rising prices. Moral persuasion has not worked in the past and will not work in the future. At most, all that can be accomplished is a levelling-off effect on food prices.