

*Food Prices*

admissibility problems with this amendment, I propose to put the amendment now so that we might minimize any delay in Your Honour deciding on its procedural acceptability.

**Mr. Speaker:** Perhaps I should warn the hon. member that if he puts his amendment, that is the end of his speech.

**Mr. Atkey:** With that injunction, Mr. Speaker, I am willing to withhold the formal moving of this amendment. I did think it might be possible to facilitate your consideration of the admissibility of the amendment, but I will consider your injunction and withhold it.

Having given you and members of the House notice of my intention, I will paraphrase the general thrust of the amendment. It is simply to refer the second report of the Special Committee on Trends in Food Prices back to the committee with an instruction to consider the relevance and the effect of the movement of several main components of the consumer price index for the month of August, 1973, as domestic factors accounting for the trends in food prices in Canada, and related matters. I will formally put the amendment at the completion of my speech.

As a general proposition, I welcome the opportunity of participating in this debate to prod the government into doing something about rising food prices. It seems to me that if the members of the only opposition party in the House had not made it known that they would not support any motion for adjournment, this House might not have been sitting this evening and might not have had an opportunity at least to attempt to come to grips with some of the very real problems facing this country in the food sector.

As has already been mentioned by several hon. members, the committee worked very hard both prior to the presentation of the first interim report made to the House last April 2 and in the period until the second report was presented on July 25.

One consistent theme running throughout the recommendations, both the first report and in the second report, was that the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs (Mr. Gray) should be doing a number of things. There were six recommendations in the first report, of which five were addressed to the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs. I regret that the minister is not present in the House tonight. In the second report presented to the House on July 25 there were nine recommendations, of which five, Nos. 3 through 7, were again directed to the minister.

Taking the recommendations from the first and second reports, ten of the fifteen substantive recommendations, or two-thirds, involve supposed actions on the part of the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs. In his absence, and to be fair to the minister, let me point out that he was not been completely unresponsive to the recommendations directed to him. He has provided funds for the Consumers Association of Canada pursuant to the sixth recommendation of the first report, and he has made certain noises about possible legislation requiring nutritional information on food products. To this point, that is just about all. That is about two out of ten. The minister is

[Mr. Atkey.]

batting about 200, which will soon qualify him for the minor league, if he does not start producing in the House soon.

Let us look at some of the recommendations of this committee which the minister has not implemented. First I want to refer to recommendation No. 5 of the second report which relates to the proclaiming of the regulations under and legislation contained in the Consumer Packaging and Labelling Act, this Act was passed in the House of Commons on March 17, 1971. It will soon be the third anniversary of the passage of that act in the House, but it is not yet the law of the land. There have been delays. The minister has been taken to task by the Consumers Council, his own creation. They have consistently berated him. He has promised a number of hon. members that the regulations will soon be made public and then brought into force, but he has consistently failed to meet these promises.

I was interested to note that the minister in his speech just before the supper hour made a commitment. He said that the regulations will be made public for the first time on September 22 and he promised, for whatever his promises are worth, that the new act will become law by the end of the year. I am willing to wager that the minister will not make it by the third anniversary of this act, which will be March 17, 1974. That is the nature of his record.

Let us look at the second recommendation that the minister has failed to implement. I refer to recommendation No. 4 in the second report which deals with the supposed assessment and review of the 1969 to 1971 food price war which we thought until this evening was being undertaken by the Combines Investigation Branch. At least, that is what one can gather from reading the report of the Director of Investigation and Research. The minister said tonight that this assessment and review never really existed.

After allowing the committee to go on since last January thinking that the report was under way and that everything was going to be looked after—he let them go on under the impression that a full assessment and review was being carried out by the Combines Investigation Branch—he comes to the House on September 17 and says that the report is not even begun. That is a despicable performance. I would think that the minister himself, who took the trouble to quote from the director's report to verify the fact that there would not be perhaps any inclination to think, or suggestion that an assessment or review had been done, should have read the full report so that he could have understood the conclusions which virtually all the members of the Special Committee on Trends in Food Prices drew from this report. I will quote briefly from a passage of the director's report, including passages that the minister himself neglected to read in his statement this afternoon. The director said:

The position of the unaffiliated independent has continued to decline, but those of the smaller chains and the affiliated independents have improved markedly. These structural developments are consistent with the "price war" that occurred in 1970 and 1971 even though its full effects remain to be assessed.

● (2010)

That is where the minister's quotation ended. He should have gone on to read this: