

Food Prices Committee

I would also emphasize that in disbanding that commission the Prime Minister made it clear that he intended to establish a contingency working group, which is now operating I believe; that working group would be responsible for continuing research on the role of prices and incomes policy in dealing with inflation. In other words, there is a group that presumably is being paid to look into inflation and prices generally including, presumably, food prices.

I have supported our amendments to the main motion, Mr. Speaker, as I feel they have been an attempt to limit the time and cost that this special committee may entail; at the same time, they have not detracted from the committee's effectiveness. In fact, I believe that an early decision, as is contemplated in the 90-day amendment, will make the committee much more effective than if it is allowed to have a protracted life. As I have already mentioned, the Prices and Incomes Commission finished their study only last August. They made ten points, including suggestions to the government. After paying \$600,000 for each one of those points, it is time the government took them into consideration before asking this House to form another committee to make further recommendations.

• (2150)

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Stevens: I wish to point out, contrary to what was suggested by the hon. member for Oshawa-Whitby, that we do take this committee seriously. Certainly I take it seriously. I only wish the committee had more effective terms of reference than have been suggested. I wish to elaborate. While it is true that food prices have been caught in our inflationary spiral, I wish to emphasize that the food industry and the agricultural industry generally have not been the main culprits contributing to this country's inflationary position.

In singling out the food industry and the farming community for this study, I suggest that the government has done so to create a scapegoat to distract public attention from matters which they feel would be much more embarrassing to them. That is why I feel that a three-month limitation is long enough for any scapegoat, even if the government has made some deal with the hon. member for York South (Mr. Lewis).

Let it be known in this House and in this land that it is the Trudeau government that has sown the seeds of inflation throughout our economy. It is unworthy of any government to now attempt to mislead the public and the voters by an unfair attack on the food and agricultural industry.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Stevens: I do not want to defend the food industry nor the farmer particularly, but I suggest that the government in singling out this particular field has done so most unfairly.

In their motion the government asks the special committee to make recommendations. Isn't that a funny twist, Mr. Speaker? Here we have people who say they can lead this country, yet they come to parliament and say, "please form a committee so that the committee can make recommendations and tell us what we should be doing." Does

[Mr. Stevens.]

this House need further evidence and, indeed, does the country need any more evidence to indicate that this government should not have the confidence of the House and, I sincerely hope, the public at large?

In various speeches made during this debate, including that of the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs, it has been stressed that the government is looking for suggestions and recommendations. We must bear in mind that this government, that claims it can lead, is asking parliament for help. Have they forgotten completely that it is the government that proposes and this parliament simply disposes? If this government is looking for suggestions, let me make a few to help them out. I hope the hon. member for Oshawa-Whitby is listening.

First, if the government truly wants to stop inflation in this country, they should start in their own back yard. Wasteful spending programs of government, and resulting governmental increases in our money supply have been the two largest contributors to inflation in Canada. If we want to appoint committees and if the government wants worthwhile recommendations, I suggest that parliament set up a special committee to inquire into and make recommendations upon the trends in government spending.

Let us not forget that this government spent many weeks and months drafting, studying and then proposing legislation, which they forced parliament to accept with the use of the guillotine, to empower them to extract taxes from the taxpayers of this country through perhaps the most extensive and complicated tax gathering process known in the world today. One wonders why they were so anxious to pass tax legislation before examining and studying government expenditures, including their own.

If some in this House feel a 90-day limitation on the committee is too short, let us expand the committee's terms of reference, including the government's spending spree, galloping taxation and monetary policies. Before the Prime Minister gained power in Ottawa, concern over the growth of public sector spending was expressed not only by the taxpayers but government officials. In an address to the annual conference of the Canadian Tax Foundation in April 1967, Hon. Mitchell Sharp, then minister of finance, invited assistance from outside government in the study of public expenditures which he described, as "the chief issue in our political life."

In the year ending March 31, 1967, Ottawa spent \$8.8 billion. Today the government is spending at double that rate. It took 100 years to reach \$8 billion in federal spending. The Trudeau government has doubled the figure in less than six years. On a per capita, real dollar basis this government is extracting 50 per cent more from every man, woman and child in this country than was taken in the last year of the Pearson government. I notice that Mr. Sharp, now the deputy prime minister—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. I think I owe it to the hon. member and to all hon. members to remind them that when they make speeches in this House they should refer to hon. members by either their constituency or the title which they hold in the ministry. The hon. member has twice, inadvertently I am sure, made a mistake; he referred to the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) and the