

Who are the hon. members that say the cost stabilization program of the United States is not working? Let me give them the figures relating to the increase in the cost of food. In August, 1971, the annual increase in the consumer price index for food in Canada was 3 per cent; in the United States it was 3.5 per cent. Then we had a government in the U. S. which acted deliberately and responsibly. In February, 1973, the annual increase in the price of food in Canada was 10.2 per cent; in the United States it was 7.6 per cent. Hon. members opposite and to my left suggest that the controls and the temporary 90-day freeze under the cost stabilization program in the United States have not worked. Rubbish!

The Progressive Conservative party has been challenged in this debate to provide the details of the cost stabilization program that would follow the 90-day freeze. As I have already indicated, I think it would be particularly dangerous for any government or party to specify at this time the details of such a program, when the very nature of a freeze is to allow consultation with provincial governments—which, after all, have a stake in the economy—with business, with consumer groups and with the unions.

If hon. members on the committee had done their homework, they would have realized that there were a number of possibilities for such a program. Some of the research documents prepared for the committee by our excellent staff discuss some of the alternatives, and all parties are free to read and discuss these as alternative approaches to a cost stabilization program. There is the normalized profit margin approach, which some members may be aware of. There is the General Motors approach, which might be attractive to others. There is the profit share approach, or there are voluntary guidelines with threatened sanctions.

There are a variety of programs, and I think it would be particularly inappropriate for a federal party, or indeed for the government, to specify openly what the long-term provisions of that cost stabilization program will be in advance of consultation. But what is necessary now is the initial dramatic and dynamic thrust of freezing prices and incomes to allow the conditions to develop for working out that program in a short space of time. That is our anti-inflation program, Mr. Speaker.

• (2040)

Some members opposite have suggested that the Conservative party is inconsistent in its approach to this committee by painting with too broad a brush. We have been in favour of the consideration of items other than food because we care about items other than food as well as food. Let me refer to the majority report of the committee to show how consistent we were and how inconsistent were some of the members of the committee who subscribe to all the recommendations in that majority report. We have in the majority report the second recommendation relating to the consumer protection provisions of the proposed competition bill. This recommendation applies to items other than food. It applies across the board to all consumer items. That is in the majority report, and it does not deal just with food. Then we have recommendation No. 4 which reads:

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That broadcasters, in particular, and all media in general, be encouraged to continue, and to increase consumer education programs and articles. Consumer information must be made available to all segments of the population and the committee invites the media to undertake more investigative reporting of consumer protection.

We agree with that, Mr. Speaker. However, it applies not only to food but to other non-food items, across the board. Obviously, the committee did not see its own inconsistency in proceeding in that fashion. Let us look at the final recommendation, No. 6:

That the Department of Consumer and Corporate Affairs make specific moneys available to consumers groups to present briefs to various governmental boards, where appropriate.

Again, Mr. Speaker, the scope is much broader than food. Some hon. members opposite do not appreciate that the problem is much broader than just food. Yet that is really the underlying basis of at least three of the recommendations to which they subscribe. This is an important aspect of the report which heretofore has gone unnoticed and shows the real inconsistency in the majority approach. On one hand they want to single out food, but on the other hand they want to paint with a broad brush. Our approach, when we saw the problem in the way it was described by some very competent witnesses, was to bite the bullet and paint with a broad brush, because that is what the Canadian people expected from us.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs has apparently taken some comfort from recommendation No. 2 of the majority report of the committee which reads:

That certain provisions of the proposed Competition Act dealing with consumer protection . . . be split off into a separate bill and enacted immediately, and not be tied in with the provisions relating to monopolies, mergers, etc., requiring reconciliation with broader policy directions relating to industrial strategy and foreign investment.

It really escapes me how the minister can take any comfort from that recommendation, when implicitly it amounts to a repudiation of the bulk of that infamous competition bill brought before this House a little more than a year ago. Essentially, what this recommendation does is take a minor portion of the bill, suggesting it is good, but hive it off from the rest of the bill which was so terrible. All of us did not want good provisions held back by the broader provisions of the competition bill which were disastrous and stand little chance of being enacted.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Boulanger):** Order, please. I regret to interrupt the hon. member, but his time has expired.

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Albanie Morin (Louis-Hébert):** Mr. Speaker, I am highly honoured, this evening, to speak as a member of the committee that studies food price trends, and also as a consumer who has seen prices rising steadily for the last ten years.

I should like especially to comment on the recommendations the committee made at the end of its report and I quote:

1. That the Government give consideration to the advisability of introducing the necessary legislation to establish an independent Food Prices Review Board . . .