

end of which we will be in the same position we are in today.

Mr. Lewis: Worse.

Mr. Grier: I suggest that it is irresponsible for a party to ask anyone to support such an empty proposal which it has placed before us in the last couple of months, a proposal so bereft of detail. It would be irresponsible for this House to adopt or support it. That proposal is so bereft of detail that, leaving aside today's high pork prices, it is far too expensive a pig in a poke. There is a vast accumulation of evidence to show that price-wage freezes simply do not work. When you take the freeze off, prices go up. Ask the boycotters in the United States, where the food boycott started. Ask the residents of Detroit who go to Windsor to buy their groceries. Ask the residents of Texas who go to Juarez in Mexico to buy their meat. Mr. Speaker, that is no solution.

This leads me to give my impression—because I want to be careful not to attribute motives in this House—of the approach taken by the Conservative party to this committee from the very beginning. As the hon. member for Northumberland-Durham reminded us, it has been consistently negative. His party has accused the government of trying to duck its responsibilities and expressed doubt all the way through as to whether the committee could accomplish anything. This negativism, it seemed to me, was carried over to their contribution to the committee itself. It was reflected, among other things, in their constant discouragement of attempts to get the committee a staff to enable it to examine the kinds of questions we all agreed needed to be gone into.

I did not get the impression that members of the Conservative party were making a serious effort to persuade other committee members to their point of view. In any event, they did not reveal that point of view in any formal way until the end of the committee hearings nor, in my judgment, did they seriously attempt to adduce evidence in support of it. I can assure the House there was very little evidence to support it.

● (2110)

Now they take the view that the government did not have a policy. So what? That is not new. But surely the committee afforded Members of Parliament an opportunity to try to construct a policy, instead of falling back on empty and sterile accusations of a political nature such as we heard again tonight. Therefore, it has often seemed to me that some members of the Conservative opposition are more interested in making food prices the political issue which the member for Northumberland-Durham promised it would be, than in trying to find answers for the Canadian people.

It has seemed to me, too, that some commentators in the mass media have shared or even fostered a general feeling of futility about the committee's work and, indeed, until a few days ago, about parliament itself. That is their privilege, but it has not made it easier to come to grips with a problem whose solution has so far eluded all Canadian governments of whatever stripe. If the accusation of futility is too harsh, I say they have encouraged an expectation that something sweeping and dramatic can be

Food Prices

done, an expectation which in view of the acknowledged complexity of the subject is not a fair one to hold out to the public. There is no shortage of simplistic, dramatic suggestions. But are we after theatre, or solutions? For theatre, I give you the speech of the hon. member for Northumberland-Durham. For solutions, Mr. Speaker, I give you a prices review board.

If the Canadian public is expecting from parliament or from the committee, or from any party, miracles in connection with rising costs, and rising food costs in particular, they will be disappointed. None of us can offer that. But we have an obligation to try to put some fairness, some equity, some justice into the entire system under which food is provided to the Canadian people. And I am prepared to broaden this to the whole element of prices. If we can get the government to approve a food prices review board set up to take effective action, we will have taken a bigger step toward fairness in costs, and food costs especially, in the last three months than parliament has taken in the past three decades.

Mr. Jim Fleming (York West): Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for affording me the opportunity to make a contribution to this debate. Before I go further, I should like to comment on the proposal put forward by the hon. member for Northumberland-Durham (Mr. Lawrence); or perhaps I should refer to it as the amendment which was ruled out of order.

Unlike the speaker who preceded me, I shall not refer to the thespian-like qualities of the hon. member for Northumberland-Durham, but the argument was the very one which the committee faced a week or week and a half ago; and this, indeed, was the decision of all members of the committee with the exception of the Official Opposition. We felt we were given certain terms of reference and had the responsibility to follow them. It would be easy politics to go beyond them, not so much for our own party, which surely would stand with the government, but for two other parties at least. Yet they at least were sufficiently responsible to recognize the character of the terms before us and to follow through and do their best to confront the trying problem we faced. Also, in making reference to the amendment which was ruled out of order by the Chair, I should like to say that if the opposition cannot draw up an amendment, how could they possibly draw up wage and price controls and make them work effectively?

Public concern about the trend in food prices in Canada is certainly no secret. It has been ventilated in the press for many months, for long before the committee began its sessions. It is experienced by every citizen, rich or poor, from a small family or a large family, in rural Canada or in urban Canada. Weekly they go to stores and in most cases when they buy food products they must pay cash. When there is the kind of inflationary trend which the entire western world faces, nothing focuses more on this problem than we all must try to cope with, and all parties are honestly, in their own way, making an effort to do that or suggesting ways in which they feel it should be done. But surely there is no more central focus than when people go to buy food and see prices creeping up. No one denies this, certainly not members on this side of the House.

The committee held intensive meetings, between four and five meetings a week for more than two months. I am