

other agencies are addressing themselves with a high degree of priority, namely, how to serve the best interests of Canadians by producing wholesome, properly balanced diets and crucial foods and at the same time keep a sizeable segment of our population in the primary business of food production so that we may retain our national independence and autonomy in the field of food production. I shall make a few general statements and go into more detail later.

First may I underscore a conviction I have voiced in this chamber on numerous occasions. The higher cost of food in Canada is not reflected directly in higher incomes for farmers. May I put some statistics on the record to demonstrate this. At present, 41 cents of every dollar spent on food in Canada finds its way into the pocket of the farmer. He gets 41 per cent of our food dollar; the other 59 per cent, or 59 cents, more than half the food dollar, goes into the pockets of other middlemen or "in between" individuals. The farmer's income is declining; that is the present trend. That is to say, the proportion of the food dollar entering his pocket is declining. In 1950, 22 years ago, approximately 58 cents of each food dollar went to the farmer. Today, 41 cents is paid to the farmer. There has been a decline in 22 years of 17 cents per dollar paid to the farmer.

Two causes, among others, must be considered when dealing with this fact. First, more and more Canadians are eating out, thus pushing up the retail price of food. That has been the significant trend in our culture. I will not give details of what I mean at present. Second, many Canadians buy what are known as convenience foods. So in a very real sense their ability to pay for services rendered in preparing the food so that it is ready for serving on the table or for placing in the oven results in food prices being increased without comparable increases finding their way into the pockets of the farmer.

In a real sense, the affluence of our society is driving up the price of prepared food, without helping the producers of food. That is one of the questions to which we must address ourselves. As more and more foods are sold in advantageous, pre-cooked and packaged forms, the selection of wholesome foods in the non-prepared state is diminished. Those in our culture who earn the lowest incomes can least afford the luxury of paying for their kitchen work to be done in a factory; they cannot afford to purchase prepared foods. Since they cannot pay for work done in factories in preparing the food, and since this work drives up food prices, the poorest strata of society is victimized by the affluence of our society. This has affected the eating habits of those who are poorest in our nation. So in a real sense, two seemingly disparate segments of our society are affected. The poorer consumer is being victimized by increasing prices, and the farmer is carrying on his shoulders an undue proportion of the burden of our cheap food policy, if one can call it that, a policy aimed at the economical production of food in Canada.

May I continue at eight o'clock, Mr. Speaker?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Laniel): Order, please. It being six o'clock, I do now leave the chair. The House will resume at eight o'clock.

At six o'clock the House took recess.

Increasing Food Prices

AFTER RECESS

The House resumed at 8 p.m.

Mr. McBride: Mr. Speaker, when the House rose at six o'clock I was referring to the fact that several different trends have converged and all bear some influence on food prices. As Your Honour will recall, earlier in my speech I referred to the increased productivity of farmers. For example, in 1955 one farmer produced enough food to feed 33 people. If my figures are accurate, in 1971 one farmer produced enough food to feed 42 people.

For a long time there has been a remarkable trend toward greater efficiency in food production on the part of farmers and primary producers. At the same time and concurrent with that increase, income in Canada and the very modest price of food have resulted in another very interesting trend. For example, in 1948 it took 40 per cent of the average Canadian's budget to put food on the table. That has now dropped to 18 per cent. Less than half the proportion of money is needed out of the take-home pay of Canadian people to put food on the table today than was needed in 1948. This means that Canadians have an increasingly larger segment of their income to spend on other goods and services.

There is a real sense in which food is not a major cost to many Canadians—this is the point I was coming to when we rose at six o'clock—but if you happen to be a Canadian with a fairly low or very low income, food is an important budgetary item. Although it may only take 18 per cent of the budget of the average Canadian, there are a large number of Canadians for whom it takes a much larger slice. It is these other Canadians, not the affluent or the average but the lower income Canadians, about whom we must be most concerned when considering the motion before us today.

The report of the Senate Special Committee on Poverty has some interesting things to say. I want to quote a few sentences which bear directly on the point I am making. This passage deals with poorer Canadians.

Consumers today face a bewildering array of choices. Consumer-durable goods in particular have become complex, and many of the once-simple food products come now in various stages of processing, in different packages, flavours, and quality.

• (2010)

That is the point I was making earlier in my speech. I continue to quote from this report at page 106.

The poor are often handicapped with respect to purchasing power by lack of education, experience, information, training, and opportunity as well as by lack of ready cash. "Best-buy" decisions depend not only on information about quality and performance, but also on a comparison of prices in different kinds of stores in different locations. To get this information takes time, effort and money. Because of transportation expenses or credit difficulties, the poor cannot shop around. As a result, they shop in small neighbourhood stores where prices are higher, and selection is limited—but where delivery service and credit are available.

The elderly poor, unable to walk far or carry bundles or afford a bus would be an outstanding example of this group. They are truly trapped.

The report continues:

The elderly poor find it difficult even to buy small portions of food suitable for one or two persons. Alarming numbers of the elderly are poor, and their problems are special. Some have