

We felt then—and our opinion has been reinforced by subsequent events—that you cannot examine food prices in isolation. I say this with special regard for my friends to my left: you must examine all of the component features of the cost of living and what contributes to food prices. We have high interest rates in Canada, which contribute substantially to the cost of building, and shelters. More particularly we have a high cost of labour, which is a very important component of food prices. We have high incomes and profits. All these things have to be examined in the over-all context of the consumer price index. For a committee of this House to be charged with the responsibility of examining food prices in isolation, I submit is a serious waste of the time of the House, notwithstanding the fact that the food prices committee has worked hard. I say this as a member of that committee.

● (2030)

So far as the Food Prices Review Board is concerned, the order in council setting up the board on May 25 said it was "to inquire into the causes of particular food price increases in any class of food products, and to issue reports thereon, with all dispatch, including recommendations where the board considers it appropriate to do so." Those were its terms of reference laid down by order in council on May 25. What, then, was the Prime Minister trying to prove in his statement of August 13 when he announced various programs that were designed to deal with the consumer price index for the month of July, which showed unprecedentedly high increases? At that time he said:

—the terms of reference of the Food Prices Review Board will be extended to provide for investigation of price increases on individual food items.

That was cruel deception. It was deception of the first order, because those were precisely the terms of reference given to the board on May 25. This was the announcement of the Prime Minister on August 13 to try to deceive the Canadian people into thinking that Mrs. Plumptre and her board, which was inactive up to that time because, on her own charge, she had not received the co-operation of the government and more particularly of the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs, were being given additional authority. The board already had those terms of reference; they had already been given authority by order in council to look into specific food price increases.

Now we have hon. members saying that the Food Prices Review Board will be the answer, that it will see to it that the policy of applying subsidies to liquid milk will be implemented. I submit that the government already has that authority. The Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs already has that authority under the Packaging and Labelling Act. He has the authority to carry out the same kind of examinations as the Food Prices Review Board is involved in at the present time. But, for reasons known only to the government, the minister refuses to promulgate and implement the regulations under the Packaging and Labelling Act notwithstanding repeated urgings from members of this House that he do so.

Parliament passed the Packaging and Labelling Act more than two years ago. It was supposed to be important consumer legislation at that time, and it is still the major consumer legislation presented by the government. Yet it

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remains inoperative because of the failure of the government to formulate and promulgate regulations which would be the operative part of the act. Such regulations would enable the government to do precisely what Mrs. Plumptre and her Food Prices Review Board are attempting to do at the present time.

So, Mr. Speaker, we do not need a Food Prices Review Board. What we need is an agency that will examine not only food prices but all the component parts of the consumer price index. And I suggest to you, sir, that what this country needs more than anything else is a new government.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McGrath: I submit that if the government were to go to the country today it would get the message, loud and clear, that the people of the country no longer want a government that ignores inflation, that ignores rising food prices, that ignores rising unemployment. I submit that the people of the country want rid of this government.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Verdun (Mr. Mackasey).

An hon. Member: This going to be great.

Hon. Bryce Mackasey (Verdun): Mr. Speaker, before I even got to my feet I heard the hon. member from Alberta say that this was going to be great. I wonder, would he advocate rolling back fuel oil prices?

Mr. Woolliams: I did not say that. On a point of privilege, Mr. Speaker, it was a friend of mine behind me. I have not said a word all night.

Mr. Mackasey: Mr. Speaker, that is such an unusual occurrence that I must apologize to the hon. gentleman. It is the first time in 12 years that he has been silent.

I do not pretend, and I do not think anyone else pretends, to have the answer to the problem of inflation. The hon. gentleman who preceded me mentioned that extraordinary measures are required. That was about his most useful statement. But he did not tell us what they are. Of course, he knows that such measures must not affect the cost of fish because fish is an important product in his riding. And the hon. member from Alberta knows that we should not roll back the price of fuel oil and natural gas because those products are important to his riding.

Mr. Nowlan: Roll back the government.

Mr. Mackasey: The hon. member says, "Roll back the government." I wonder how many people in the hon. gentleman's party would say, "Let us roll back the price of wheat." As a city slicker, frankly I am surprised that the whole attack I have heard today has been on the farmers of the country. I represent a city riding and I cannot get overexcited at the fact that the farmers in the west are for the first time earning a decent income, that farmers elsewhere are getting a decent price for their eggs and poultry, and that fishermen are getting a decent price for their fish.