

Food Prices Committee

Mr. Stollery: He did not mention that. What exactly is the correct story? On the one hand it is claimed by large department stores that they cannot make any money. It is not their fault, they say, that prices are skyrocketing? It is plain that the reason IGA is not making any money is that they have too many stores doing too little business. Dominion has got rid of most of the neighbourhood stores in Toronto and claims that by making its new stores larger and more efficient it makes a larger profit. The French have had experience with very large supermarkets, the largest in the world and the most efficient. It is claimed by some that these efficient super-supermarkets have contributed to the price stabilization that has occurred in France over the past few months.

I for one am a merchandiser, coming from a family of merchandisers who until we sold our business three years ago had a significant effect on stabilizing the price of shirts in this country. I should like to know whether any of these stores are making any money or whether their share in the larger responsibility for food prices in this country. We also have the middlemen, the packagers, the processors and the jobbers; they say they also do not make any money. Evidently nobody in the food business makes any money.

The New Democratic Party say that middlemen are unnecessary; at least, that was the inference I drew from the remarks about unnecessary packaging. On the other hand, people work in the packaging industry, which provides jobs, a problem to which I thought the NDP was addressing itself. I must admit that when I fight my way into a package of vacuum-packed bacon I also wonder about the necessity for a packaging industry. Perhaps the committee will be able to throw some light on this matter.

Not long ago I attended the annual meeting of Ontario food processors along with the hon. member for Don Valley (Mr. Gillies). His solution to the problem, he said, was to allow the industry to rationalize. According to him, it would become more efficient that way. However, it did occur to me that the 200 members in the audience on that occasion might shrink to about 20 members at the next annual meeting in 1973 who would be discussing behind closed doors how to fix prices on food. In our own business the industry was dominated by a few large shirt manufacturers, and I recall Cluett, Peabody and Company removing their merchandise from our store because we refused to sell their shirts at the suggested retail price.

The approach of the Conservative party to this committee has been very obscure. On the one hand there seems to be a suggestion of support for the committee to investigate prices and to make recommendations; on the other hand there seems to be a bias against informing the Canadian public. The other day the hon. member for Kingston and The Islands (Miss MacDonald) referred to the important work done by the Senate Committee on Poverty and I know she will agree with me that it is unfortunate that the chairman of that committee will not serve on this proposed committee.

I have referred to two of the three areas that affect the price of food. Like the hon. member for Broadview (Mr. Gilbert), I too am a city boy. Coming from the city, I do not know the first thing about farms or farm prices. However, I do not see anything in this motion referring to

farmers or farms and I have seen no reference to them in any amendment. Nor do I see anything in the motion that I am supporting singling out farmers as opposed to middlemen, merchandisers or anybody else.

I am surprised at the members of the Conservative party, being at their most negative, assuming that this whole proposal is a plot against or attack on the farmers of this country. Surely the idea here is to investigate in a positive way the exceptional rise in food prices over the past 12 months. Equally, one cannot investigate food prices unless we investigate them at the farm level, at the producer level. All I know about eggs is that they always seem to be stale, in spite of what the hon. member for Saskatoon-Biggar (Mr. Gleave) had to say last night about the quality of their shells. Certainly when you buy eggs in Toronto you can hardly cook them, they are so stale. I should like to know why this is the case and possibly I will get this information from the committee.

In any event, I was most surprised at the assumption last night that this House was preparing an attack on farmers. The hon. member for York-Simcoe (Mr. Stevens), in defence of farmers, made some references that I would have thought would be better reserved for the representations that he will undoubtedly be making to the committee, which after all is what this committee is for. Surely the motion is very clear, to the effect that the committee will investigate the cost of this inordinate price rise.

• (2050)

We want information concerning why food prices have risen so sharply in such a short period, what constitutes those prices and what percentage represents what. We also must ask why this mysterious business of food is so unknown to everybody in Canada. Members of the New Democratic Party and members of the Conservative party could undoubtedly comment on the reason for the rise. However, no one really knows. I think we should allow the committee to do a thorough job of investigation in order to clarify the situation and bring forward solid recommendations.

For some time I have wondered why the price of beef in 1961 and 1962 rose and then dropped eight points. I have also wondered why eggs are always so stale, particularly on the other side of this House. In supporting the motion I shall conclude by wishing the committee well. I hope it will act positively and not give in to the negative attitudes displayed on the other side of the House. I would hope that after 53 people have spoken in various ways on this subject, this should be enough. I would now like to see us get down to business.

Mr. Gus Mitges (Grey-Simcoe): Mr. Speaker, I begin by saying that it is a most humbling experience to be called upon to speak for the first time in the presence of so many distinguished parliamentarians and accomplished orators. I would also like to add my congratulations to those of my colleagues to Your Honour on your appointment as Speaker of the House. In addition, I wish to congratulate my colleague, the hon. member for Halifax-East Hants (Mr. McCleave) on his appointment to the office of Deputy Speaker and chairman of committees of the whole House. He brings a wealth of experience and judgment to that office and I am sure he will serve with distinction.

[Mr. Stollery.]