

Food Prices

removed there will be fantastic pressures to push prices upward, beyond the point they had reached when the ceiling was imposed.

The Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs (Mr. Gray) has told the House he will make a positive response to each and every recommendation in our report.

Mr. Frank: When?

Mr. Penner: Did you listen to his speech? He told us when. He said he would do so on an urgent basis and would provide us with detailed plans and policies early in May.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Penner: I think members of the committee would expect no less. Finally, I would say it is very important to the 25 members who served on the trends in food prices committee that we test the House with respect to the report we have submitted. The committee was a servant of the House of Commons and it deserves to know the judgment of parliament on the work it has done. I therefore urge all members not to talk out this motion, but to allow it to go to a vote at ten o'clock in order that those who worked long and hard and in a very dedicated way on the committee may know whether or not they have served the House of Commons well.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

• (2150)

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Marie Boisvert (Drummond): Mr. Speaker, I would like to deal tonight with several aspects of the problem that faces us.

First of all, there is the problem of rising prices. Why are prices increasing in such an alarming way from one month to another? What are the effects of this rise on the middle class, and then on the disadvantaged category which is reaching increasingly larger proportions in Canada? What are the influence and importance of the big trusts with respect to the problem of inflation at home and even abroad, considering the sprouting of an ever larger number of multinational corporations? What evidence has been given in the food prices committee to point out where the actual problems were? How is the collusion of traditional governments being expressed? What is the solution offered by our traditional governments? What is, finally, the alternative advocated by our party, in those circumstances?

Mr. Speaker, prices are going up at an alarming rate in all fields. Here we are considering the problem of food prices in particular. We must not forget that food prices are not completely independent of prices in other sectors of the country's economy. Indeed, other sectors are experiencing the same problem, whether we are talking about clothing, automobiles, building, housing or transportation. We have reached the stage, especially for small wage-earners, where inflation has reached the limit. Formerly, people would spend less money on food, so as to make ends meet, but in view of the price increases in all the areas I have just mentioned, that has become impossi-

[Mr. Penner.]

ble. In many cases, people want more than food handouts to the poor, which the hon. minister suggested recently.

What are the causes of inflation? One of them is obviously the excessive profits made by some companies, and their way of exploiting people's senses, if you look, for example, at the way they present products. In some cases, the packaging costs more than the product itself. That means that the merchants, the producers, are less interested in satisfying the people than in making a profit. For those who exploit human poverty, all that counts is making a profit, getting steadily richer while others are getting poorer.

The committee heard evidence from dozens of people, representatives of the manufacturers' association, producers, farmers, packers, advertisers or any other associations, to the effect that it was not their fault if there was inflation and rising prices, but the fault of other people who could not be named. In the end, Mr. Speaker, where is the problem? It seems to me that if the committee does not get to the deeper causes of the present unrest, it is missing the point and merely acting as a safety valve in society.

Canadians are beginning to be hungry; the Roman principle is applied: They are given games or still a minor committee is established to reduce them to silence or let them hope that the problem will be settled while knowing quite well that this will only contribute to satisfy them temporarily and the problem will persist because it is in the interests of those who benefit from it.

The solution of conventional governments is price control or price freeze. Prices are controlled but a black market is created. As noted recently, a meat boycott is under way. Suddenly, the people became tired of the boycott and they began to buy. This is exactly what will happen when price control or freeze will come to an end.

In my opinion, we should apply a solution which would be much more favourable to the people than to those who strive to control it and get rich at their expense. That is the solution our party recommends. A discount on purchases should be granted, not to the producer, but to the consumer. Mr. Speaker, no incentives should be offered for production when products are in sufficient supply, but potential buyers of the products should have incentives and thus the wheels of economy will be able to turn. This system should be carried out in association with dealers, with producers willing to have this type of market.

I suggest, Mr. Speaker, that this solution be considered; it is one which would suit, not the minority, but a majority of the population as a whole.

[English]

Mr. Gordon Ritchie (Dauphin): Mr. Speaker, there has been a steady rise in food costs which has been accompanied by a steady migration from the land of rural Canada. This must be taken into account when we consider food costs and what has happened in the last few years. Farm units have become larger, with many farmers producing much more specialized grains, along with beef cattle and so on.

May I call it ten o'clock?