

numbers on their licence plates can get gas on odd dates and cars with even-numbered licence plates can get gas on even dates. Imagine a situation in which it becomes newspaper headlines that the state of Florida is getting an increase in its quota of gasoline, a commodity which is so important to an area dependent upon the tourist industry.

About a week ago last Sunday I visited a small town in Costa Rica with a friend who had a car. To discourage people from using gas on Sundays and to encourage them to use the buses, all the gas pumps had padlocks on them with big official stickers. It occurred to me that we were very, very fortunate in Canada, where this sort of thing has not happened, as I surreptitiously went from gas station to gas station with a plastic pail in an attempt to buy a gallon of gasoline, giving them the story, which was very difficult, that I might become a regular customer.

We have been fortunate in having an energetic minister to handle this complicated situation since it started to develop, and it is with great confidence that I read how the government proposes to continue to expand its policy in order to assure gasoline and other forms of energy to all Canadians at equal prices.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Stollery: This is a most important issue which will be resolved, and it seems to me that this government has taken and is continuing to take steps to resolve it in a way that will put Canada in probably the best energy position in the industrial world. We have been fortunate in our natural resources and fortunate in having a government that is planning to use these natural resources to the benefit of all Canadians.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

[Translation]

Mr. Stollery: It seems to me that world food shortages and energy problems are closely interrelated. Both issues are linked with the commodity situation and are dependent upon international goods and foodstuffs markets. It is therefore particularly timely that this Speech from the Throne should present the provision of reasonable and reliable supplies of foodstuffs at decent prices both for the consumer and the producer as one of the major concerns of this government. The more one reads about the complexity, if not the intricacy, of food markets, about the progressive internationalization of these markets, and the way they elude national legislations, the more one is puzzled by this serious problem.

● (1430)

[English]

The price of food in this country has been seriously affected by the fact that the United States dollar has been effectively devalued by approximately 27 per cent since about 1967. That is a truly astonishing reality. The United States dollar has dropped by nearly one-third its value in relation to the currencies of most other countries. For example, it has dropped 36 per cent in the past year compared to the Japanese yen. Unless we should be financiers, most of us do not pay much attention to figures of this type when we see them on the financial page of a newspaper. We might read the *Wall Street Journal* or scan

The Address—Mr. Stollery

the *Globe and Mail* financial section, but it requires a grounding in economics for these figures to have meaning to a layman like myself.

Over the past year I acquired a grounding in economics and undoubtedly will attain more in the coming year. Of course, the effective devaluation of 27 per cent in the United States dollar affects the life of every Canadian. When Japanese automotive companies or television companies, German steel companies or whatever, sell goods to the United States, which after all is still by far the largest trading area and consuming market in the world, they are paid in United States dollars. What do they do with those United States dollars? The company or industry is interested in protecting its purchasing power. This is a perfectly legitimate interest which has nothing to do with speculation, although the speculators, who I am sure many governments would like to get, artificially accentuate the situation.

The holding of United States dollars today is no way in which to protect your purchasing power, based on the facts. Who wants money that has been devalued by 27 per cent over the past few years, when one may have to buy iron ore, rubber or copper with it and have to exchange that money in order to pay bills in the money of the country which produces the iron ore, the copper or the rubber?

With the political situation that exists in the United States it would be difficult to have great confidence, in the near future, in the United States dollar. So, of course, companies and industries holding cheapening currencies often invest in the one commodity that always maintains its value—food. They buy food futures and drive the price of, say, soybeans, upward. The price of this commodity normally is about \$80 a ton, but now it is from \$450 to \$600 a ton and it has been as high as \$700 a ton. We know this type of activity has existed in respect of oil and gold, driving the price of gold from somewhere in the range of \$30 an ounce to \$175 an ounce. Of course, this is done in respect of food and prices are driven artificially higher which, as I have said, affects the purchasing power of every Canadian.

The Speech from the Throne explains that the commodity price rise is a worldwide phenomenon and mentions this serious disorder in the international economic situation. In that vein the speech proposes reasonable food prices for the consumer and the producer. As I have said, the value of commodities in some of the producing countries has been wiped out by the increase in the price of petroleum. On the other hand, there are countries such as Malaysia which have had a sudden increase in their wealth because of increased commodity prices and some self-sufficiency in respect of petroleum products.

As Canadians, I think we have the right to be resentful if our prices are artificially manipulated by speculators. On the other hand, in all conscience we cannot object too strongly to paying a fair price for some of the items which we import. We cannot object to an increase in the standard of living of deprived field workers in some tropical countries who earn 20 cents or 50 cents a day. As consumers, we cannot object too strongly to paying fair prices to Canadian food producers so long as we receive fair value.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!