

government to raise the rate paid for the movement of grain is clearly unfounded.

As regards Canadian National Railways, this company does not intend to lay off maintenance workers in large numbers as CP Rail has been forced to do. CN lay-offs are not expected to exceed very small numbers as required in the normal course of events to adjust the work force to local needs. As a result, grain shipments will not be adversely affected in any way.

● (2230)

FOOD PRICES REVIEW BOARD—REPORT ON FISH PRICES—  
POSSIBILITY OF REFERENCE TO COMBINES INVESTIGATION  
BRANCH

**Mr. Jack Marshall (Humber-St. George's-St. Barbe):** Mr. Speaker, I am glad to see that the Secretary of State for External Affairs (Mr. MacEachen) has remained behind to hear what I have to say. I am pleased to have this opportunity to follow up my question of June 27 to the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs (Mr. Ouellet), which, stated very simply, was this. I asked whether, in view of the fact that the Food Prices Review Board report on fisheries indicated a wide discrepancy between the wholesale and retail prices of fish, from 49 cents a pound to \$1.08 a pound, the minister intended to bring the matter to the attention of the combines investigation branch of his department. The minister replied that as a result of the excellent report of the Food Prices Review Board he hoped that he would be able to take action on the recommendations. Further, on requesting action on anti-profiteering legislation, the minister indicated appropriate action would be taken.

Naturally the discrepancy that I mentioned between wholesale and retail prices is further aggravated when one considers the spread between the price paid to the fishermen and the price paid by the consumer, which is more frightening. The spread in price in some cases reaches some 1,000 to 2,000 per cent, if one can imagine such a spread.

While I recognize that the yield of some delicate species of fish justifies a variance, it is a wonder that Canadian consumers do pay, for example, approximately \$1.50 for a couple of ounces of herring processed outside Canada, which originally brought the fishermen 3½ cents a pound in Canada at the wharf. This suggests to me that something is wrong or fishy, and is an indication of the inefficiency of our government's marketing policy regarding our fish resources.

Not only is there inefficiency, Mr. Speaker, but complacency, apathy, and a complete disregard for the value of our fish stocks as a source of protein and nutrition not only for the poor of Canada but, internationally, for the poor and poverty stricken of the world. Furthermore, the department shows a blatant disregard for its responsibility.

Almost each and every day in this House of Commons we hear references to prices of food and the difficulties experienced by the people of Canada. Indeed, there is reference to the ineptitude of government in controlling the price of beef, pork, poultry, eggs, and other commodities which we have in abundance in Canada. For some reason or other we ignore the renewable resources of the sea which, if protected by our government, could provide a

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protein-rich food resource at a reasonable price to the consumer, in spite of inflationary pressures, on a continuing basis.

I have made reference to the herring species, but there are many other examples of fish the price of which indicate rip-off profits, such as cod, mackerel, lobster, salmon, halibut and many other species available in Canada.

The Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs has the ammunition to investigate this atrocious practice, and I wonder what he is waiting for before implementing legislation that would prevent this rip-off of many people in Canada. The government is always asking members of the opposition for suggestions. In many cases I have tried to co-operate. In this case I can only ask the minister to investigate the system of pricing from the fishermen through to the buyer, the processing plant, or even beyond, to determine the discrepancy which exists. This would render invaluable service to the Canadian consumer.

**Mr. Norman A. Cafik (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs):** Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for Humber-St. George's-St. Barbe (Mr. Marshall) has raised an important question. In his remarks tonight I think he has gone beyond the specific question of the pricing of fish to the whole question of the fisheries and its importance in terms of protein, nutrients, etc.

If I may deal with the specific question as it relates to the Department of Consumer and Corporate Affairs, I should first of all say that, as the hon. member knows, the Food Prices Review Board has conducted an investigation which was confined primarily to the Toronto area. We have taken a great deal of interest in its findings and we hope it will pursue the whole question to find out whether, from its point of view, these spreads are justified.

I should point out to the hon. members of this House that we in the Department of Consumer and Corporate Affairs do not have the legislative base to set some kind of prices or margins on prices. As the hon. member knows, prior to the 1974 election we introduced a bill, called the anti-profiteering bill, which would have given us the legislative authority to take action in connection with what the hon. member might call rip-off prices. That bill was not passed due to the opposition of his own party and other opposition parties in this House, so we are without that legislative base from which to take action.

Subsequently we indicated that it is our intention in the department to bring forward an anti-profiteering bill which would again give us some legislative base to deal with that kind of question on a selective basis. I think it is a very important thing, and we do need this legislative base. When we have the authority from parliament, action of that type may well be taken on these important occasions.

To suggest that we do have the legislative authority to taken action in terms of investigation is true under the Combines Investigation Act, through the director of investigation and research. However, I think the hon. member and all Canadians ought to know that in the action we can take there is no relationship to the setting of prices, but only relationship to collusion or the fixing of prices between differing groups within the market place. We see no