

There was evidence presented to the committee very early in its deliberations to suggest that there was a very serious nutritional problem in Canada, and if there was such a problem then it is all the more serious today. There are many people in this country who cannot afford a nutritious diet. There are many in this country who are under-nourished. This is especially so among children; it is especially so among old people, and it is especially so among the unemployed.

In my opinion, Mr. Speaker, the working poor are the ones who are the worst off because they have to suffer the terrible frustration of not being able to afford an adequate diet with their hard earned money. Of course, the poor of this country, according to the best definition and the best advice that I have, represent 25 per cent of the population—one-quarter of the population, living at or below what has been defined as the poverty line.

● (1540)

Finally, Mr. Speaker, that first report recommended that specific moneys be made available to consumer groups to make representations to government where appropriate. I can see the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs (Mr. Gray) reacting to that one by saying the government has already substantially increased the grant to the Consumers' Association of Canada. I commend him for that action, Mr. Speaker, but that increase was long overdue and it is not what the committee had in mind. The committee was referring to those new groups that have sprung up across the country; groups that represent the working poor, the anti-poverty groups, the citizens' rights groups—those who have banded together so that they may collectively give voice to the terrible frustration their members feel at not being able to provide adequate diets for their families, not being able to properly clothe their families and not being able to make it because of today's seriously inflated prices. These groups were born out of the sheer frustration of trying to survive on inadequate incomes at today's prices.

Mr. Speaker, it is not possible to discuss the report before us without discussing the first report, and the shameful failure of the government to implement all its recommendations. Surely, this must be the first time that a special committee has had to remind the government, by way of a recommendation, to get on with the implementation of its first report; that must be unprecedented. Certainly, it says something about this government's attitude to the special committee on Trends in Food Prices; it shows, Mr. Speaker, that the contempt characterized by the government in their attitude toward the trends in food prices is similar to their attitude to the other committees of this House and that is a shame.

This party dissented from the first report because we felt it did not contain an over-all policy recommendation to deal with the cause of rising food prices and because we felt at the time, and subsequent experience has sustained us in this view, that a Food Prices Review Board would be ineffective and virtually useless as its terms of reference were too confined. We made this clear at the time. That is not to suggest, Mr. Speaker, that we did not support the other recommendations, the effect of which would be, as I have said, to deal with some of the consequences of inflation and high food prices. Indeed, the Progressive Conser-

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vative members on that committee played a very active role in drafting that first report.

I believe it is only fair to say that the government owes this committee and this House an explanation. Otherwise by its actions, the government stands in contempt of the very committee which it set up as a special committee to deal with trends in food prices.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McGrath: There is certainly no doubt in my mind, Mr. Speaker, that this has been a hard-working committee, a committee on which all of the members took their duties very seriously. I think it can be said of this committee as a whole that, as a result of the hard work and dedication of its members, it has achieved what I consider to be a rare thing for committees these days. It has achieved a degree of collegiality which no longer seems to characterize the committees of this House because of the new rules. These rules make it very difficult for committees to have any degree of collegiality or cordiality or any degree of comradeship or any degree of working-together.

Mr. Nielsen: They have goon squads over there.

Mr. McGrath: As my colleague, the hon. member for the Yukon (Mr. Nielsen) has pointed out, not only is there a lack of collegiality but we have witnessed the moving goon squads. They move from committee to committee to boost the government's side so that the government's position can always be maintained.

An hon. Member: What crap!

Mr. McGrath: Mr. Speaker, the special committee, referred to in the Speech from the Throne, was set up on January 23 and has heard 35 witnesses in 28 meetings. Many of these meetings were four-hour sessions, although there were times when the committee sat longer. I am sure that members of the committee, without exception, view with as much concern as I the failure of the government to proceed with the implementation of the recommendations of the first report and the attitude of the government, generally, to this special committee and the two reports.

We view it with great concern Mr. Speaker, because the subject before this special committee of the House is one that requires urgent and immediate attention. It is difficult, if not impossible, for us to understand why the government does not treat the committee with the same sense of urgency and the same sense of immediacy as the committee is viewed by its members.

Members of this House, without exception, are affected by rising food prices but there are those in our society who are more affected. I refer to those people on lower and fixed incomes, the working poor and the unemployed. The over half a million Canadians who are unemployed have to pay the same inflated prices for food, have to make it on unemployment insurance benefits, have to feed their families on their weekly unemployment cheques or, worse, on their weekly welfare cheques. We are talking about 500,000 Canadians, citizens of this country who have families to support.

Then, there are the working poor whose ranks are growing rapidly because of the escalating rate of inflation.