

Increasing Food Prices

increase. I think this is very unfair and I wanted to clear it for the record.

I appreciate that many speakers today have come to the aid of the farmer. I was interested in the speech of the hon. member for Yorkton-Melville (Mr. Nystrom), but I think he was not quite correct. He kept saying, "This is all that the farmer has left" and seemed to neglect the fact that the farmer has to meet all his expenses from the money he receives. The margin is not money in his pocket.

I should like to examine a few more facts, Mr. Speaker, though I have had to throw away most of my statistics because they have already been used. The average disposable income in Canada almost tripled between 1949 and 1959. According to the food policy booklet issued by the Department of Agriculture, it rose from \$884 to \$1,416 per person in ten years and to \$2,398 per person by 1969. In contrast to income, food prices increased only by slightly more than half during the same 20-year period. The cost of meat, vegetables, fruit, milk, bread and other foods needed to feed a family of four for one week was \$20 in 1949 and \$24 in 1959.

• (2110)

In 1949 a man worked, on the average, 20 hours to feed a family of four for one week. In 1969, according to the latest figures, he had to work only 11 hours for the same end. So he now has to work 11 hours as opposed to 20 to feed a family of four for one week.

An hon. Member: How is the farmer benefiting?

Mr. Pringle: Like most consumers, our housewives have probably found that there is more income available to spend on food. One may assume that they buy more food, but this is not necessarily true since high income families usually buy more expensive foods such as tender steaks, greens and berries out of season, and so on. However, even though the housewife spends more on higher priced foods, the proportion of average disposable income spent on food in retail stores is smaller than ever. For example, in 1949 about 22 per cent of disposable income was spent on food and now only about 15 per cent is so spent.

Where does the money go? We know that some of it must go to the farmer who must be paid for growing food and raising livestock. We know that some of it goes to the man who sells the food, or to the chain store. What happens in between? Let us consider that labour costs have been increasing, and still are going up, up and up. They are not accelerating on a true percentage basis, since the latest increase is based on a percentage of the former wage which itself was based on a former increase. Also, transportation costs are increasing.

In addition to labour costs and other costs, raw material costs used for packaging are going up. The housewife today buys more so-called packaged foods or convenience foods. Hon. members can check this. More convenience foods than ever are being sold. I am talking of heat-and-eat items, TV dinners and prepared pies. The housewife at one time worked in the garden. She was the food processor in the home; she stayed at home and bottled and processed. Now she does other things. Now housewives eat lunch at the club and think of things to do in the afternoon. They do not process foods as they once did.

[Mr. Pringle.]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Laniel): Order, please. I regret to interrupt the hon. member but his time has expired.

Mr. Eldon M. Woolliams (Calgary North): Mr. Speaker, I had hoped the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Olson) would be in his place to listen to the very thoughtful speech of the hon. member for Fraser Valley East (Mr. Pringle) who I thought was fair in his summing up. Having listened to the debate today which involved members on all sides of the House, I think it can be said that nobody—I include the NDP particularly, my party and hon. members opposite—attacked the primary producer, the farmer, for what he is getting.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Woolliams: We are saying that food costs in Canada are high; that veterans, for example, whose benefits were recently increased by 3.6 per cent, are still struggling to make ends meet; that old age pensioners, whose pensions were increased by \$2.88 a month, are still finding it difficult to pay food bills and live at standards we think are acceptable for Canadians; and that those on the guaranteed income supplement, whose maximum benefits increased from \$137.70 to \$150—about \$13—still find it difficult to meet expenses. That is what we are saying.

I congratulate, at the outset, the hon. member for Vancouver-Kingsway (Mrs. MacInnis) for bringing this matter before the House, because the cost of food to consumers, particularly those on fixed incomes, is probably the most serious question facing Canadians today. We have heard much this week about foreign takeovers. Perhaps it is time to examine some chain stores. If the government is serious in its takeover policy and if it is not mere window-dressing, this would be a good area to examine. Perhaps a former Liberal, now a judge in Saskatchewan, Mary Batten, would conduct an investigation in this field. I think such an investigation would be worth while for Canadians.

An hon. Member: Now tell us about increased legal fees.

Mr. Woolliams: One of our difficulties in dealing with the situation is that the primary producer, the farmer, is not making enough income. Let us talk about the return he receives for his work.

An hon. Member: Tell us about increased legal fees.

Mr. Woolliams: I wish the hon. member would get off the pot. It seems that he has been on marijuana for so long that his head has gone funny.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Corbin: That was a most responsible statement, I must say.

Mr. Woolliams: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is always talking. Let us consider the price of beef. The price to the farmer is between 31 cents and 38 cents per pound in the stockyards. And what does the consumer pay for beef?

An hon. Member: And for legal fees?