

*Price Control*

**Mr. Hellyer:** They are hiding in the closet with the skeletons.

**Mr. Speaker:** Order, please. I see the hon. member for Toronto-Lakeshore rising on a point of order.

**Mr. Grier:** On a point of order, Mr. Speaker, may I ask the hon. member, through you, if he will permit a question at this time.

**Mr. Speaker:** That is hardly a point of order. Perhaps the hon. member for St. John's East might be allowed to continue his speech.

**Mr. McGrath:** Mr. Speaker, I will gladly permit the hon. member's question, if he will permit me to call it one o'clock.

**Some hon. Members:** Agreed.

**Mr. Speaker:** This procedure is unusual. I do not see how the hon. member can ask his question if we call it one o'clock. I shall inquire if hon. members wish to call it one o'clock.

**Some hon. Members:** One o'clock.

**Mr. Speaker:** It being one o'clock, I do now leave the chair.

At 12.58 p.m. the House took recess.

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**AFTER RECESS**

The House resumed at 2 p.m.

**Mr. McGrath:** Mr. Speaker, I had hoped to be able to give up the floor to the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Whelan) who, I understand, will be making a statement later today.

**Mr. Baldwin:** He has to check it out with the NDP first.

**Mr. McGrath:** We look forward to that statement. Obviously, as my colleague said, he has to have it checked out first with the junior member of the coalition.

When the House rose for the luncheon recess, I was replying to the hon. member for Toronto-Lakeshore pointing out to him the weaknesses in his motion and why we feel we cannot support that motion in its present form. That is not to say we are not prepared to support any reasonable motion the New Democratic Party has to bring before this House. We realize the situation is urgent. We also realize this government has to be prodded into action before it will take steps to provide the kind of remedy necessary to cope with the very serious crisis facing this country today.

Let us take a look at the record. In the last session, the government opened parliament with this reference in the Speech from the Throne. This was in 1973. I quote:

While food prices in Canada have steadied slightly in the last month or so, the Government is concerned about possible future effects of the world-wide trend toward higher food prices and will propose the

[Mr. McGrath.]

setting up of a Joint Committee of the Senate and the House of Commons to make a special study of this problem.

A year has passed. That special study was undertaken by the Special Committee on Trends in Food Prices under the chairmanship of the hon. member for Sarnia-Lambton (Mr. Cullen). Time will not permit me to repeat the recommendations made by that committee in its three reports, but I think it should be pointed out that, in the main, the recommendations of that committee stand ignored. For example, the first recommendation in the first report called for special legislation setting up a Food Prices Review Board. Special legislation, given the make-up of this parliament, would have meant the House would have had some input into the terms of reference of the Food Prices Review Board. I submit we would have had today a meaningful review board with adequate terms of reference and adequate powers to deal with the problem facing the country today. Instead, the government ignored that part of the report, circumvented parliament and set up the board we now have under the authority of the Inquiries Act. The result is that the board, with all its imperfections, has no minister to whom to report. It does not report to this House; its reports are made public. Consequently, this House has no opportunity to comment on the reports, to study the reports or to call upon the board to explain its reports unless, of course, the government brings in a reference to the appropriate committee.

● (1410)

I should add that to cope with that situation we recommended in our last report, the third and final report of the food prices committee, realizing that as a special committee we would die with the end of the session, that the government immediately set up a standing committee on consumer affairs. We made that recommendation in order to ensure that there would be a standing committee of this House set up for the purpose of dealing with the subject matter of the hon. member's motion. More particularly we would have a standing committee of the House to which the reports of the Food Prices Review Board could be referred.

It is rather interesting that just a few days ago I asked the government House leader when he proposed implementing that final recommendation of the Special Committee on Trends in Food Prices, but the response that I received, Mr. Speaker, was anything but encouraging. As a matter of fact, the minister made it very clear that, in his opinion, there are already too many standing committees of the House, and he implied that for this reason he did not see how it could be practical to set up another standing committee. So now we have to carry on by having matters relating to the Food Prices Review Board either referred to the Standing Committee on Miscellaneous Estimates or to one of the omnibus standing committees, such as the Standing Committee on Health, Welfare and Social Affairs. I submit that this is just not good enough.

As for the other recommendations of the Special Committee on Trends in Food Prices, as I say, time will not permit me to list them all. However, we did recommend, for example, a school lunch program, a two-price system, and that the government get on with a special study of a food policy for Canada. All of the recommendations of the committee, with one or two minor exceptions—and these