

Food Prices

can have in this House the verbal and articulate support of this measure of the hon. member for Kent-Essex and other rural members from the province of Ontario.

Mr. Stanfield: Tell us what it is.

Mr. Macdonald (Rosedale): The measure is to restrain the prices of gasoline, diesel oil and heating fuel, which the Leader of the Opposition opposes. He would just as soon have higher prices for these to satisfy his Alberta members. However, I hope the Ontario members will support those of us on this side of the House who would like to keep the prices down for the consumer, and particularly the farmer.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

● (2050)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Caouette (Témiscamingue): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I apologize to the hon. member for Vancouver Kingsway (Mrs. MacInnis), but the hon. member for Témiscamingue (Mr. Caouette) is rising on a point of order.

Mr. Caouette (Témiscamingue): Mr. Speaker, I just want to say that, in my view, the minister does not know carrots from a gallon of gas.

[*English*]

Mrs. Grace MacInnis (Vancouver Kingsway): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for St. Paul's (Mr. Atkey) went through the list of recommendations of the food prices committee on which the government has taken very little action. He did a very thorough job of going over those recommendations. But it was the hon. member for St. John's East (Mr. McGrath), the member who introduced the resolution, who pointed out, quite correctly, that the two most important recommendations of the food prices committee to date were the ones having to do with the setting up of the Food Prices Review Board and with urging the government to take measures to put food on the tables of people with low incomes.

Both those measures were introduced in the committee by members of this party, and the members of the other parties were very lukewarm about them, particularly the one having to do with putting food on the tables of those of low income. Members of the Conservative party in particular were very much opposed and very vocal in their opposition to setting up the Food Prices Review Board. The reason was that they were obsessed with the single idea that the only way to tackle the question of food along with the rise in the cost of living was to set up a system similar to that in the United States, a stop-and-go policy of freeze, price rise, further freeze, another price rise, and so on. It was a sort of leap the dips approach which would leave the consumer dipping more than he would be leaping.

An hon. Member: Don't forget our friends opposite.

Mrs. MacInnis (Vancouver Kingsway): The Liberals may have been doing something like that too, but the

[Mr. Macdonald (Rosedale).]

Tories are certainly noteworthy for the fact that since the Food Prices Review Board was set up over their loud protests they are now attacking it for not doing the things that they did not want it to do in the first place or felt it should not do. The Conservatives had this fixed idea, so it is somewhat entertaining to see them now lashing themselves into a fury at the government for failing to use the Food Prices Review Board to bring down food prices.

Opposition to giving the board the powers it must have is equally visible on the part of the government. It was very visible this afternoon in the attitude of the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs (Mr. Gray) when he spoke in this debate. I am glad to see him in his seat once more. The minister was very firm in warning that if we were going to give an independent board the power that some of us contend it must have to be effective—that is, power to cancel or roll back price increases that are unjustified—we would be letting ourselves in for serious trouble.

I should like to ask the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs, has he forgotten about the powers of the Canadian Transport Commission to deal with such things as wages and whether people get stations in their area, and so on? Has he forgotten that the CRTC has very wide powers involving all kinds of things in the field of communications? Has he forgotten the powers that the National Energy Board has been clothed with? All of these are independent boards.

Mr. Gray: Are not members complaining about them every day?

Mrs. MacInnis (Vancouver Kingsway): Members may be complaining, but the fact is that the government has established the boards and kept them going. Consequently, the minister is in a very peculiar position if he now says that it is impossible to have a similar board to protect consumers in the matter of food and food costs. As a matter of fact, I can only come to the conclusion that he either considers it is not important to protect people in this way or that he simply is not interested in investigating the matter.

As a matter of fact, when the minister spoke this afternoon he slipped as nimbly as did the Minister of Finance (Mr. Turner) behind the workings of the international marketplace as an excuse for leaving people to sink in the morass of inflation, taking the attitude that nothing much can be done except to wait and see and to let nature take its course. Meanwhile, in order to make sure that nothing is really being done, we have his steady resistance to giving the Food Prices Review Board the powers it must have if it is to do anything.

The minister must know—after all, he has a good head when he is not obsessed with the idea that he must not use it—that going out and snooping around stores to see that prices are as advertised is a useless exercise. Shoppers do that kind of thing themselves and they complain bitterly when they find discrepancies between the advertised price and the actual price of articles on the shelves. I am afraid that the chairman of the Food Prices Review Board would hardly qualify as a candidate for the FBI when she permits the army of snoopers to set out, everybody knowing