

Proceedings on Adjournment Motion

Mr. Saltzman: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. It may be an honour for the Minister of Corporate and Consumer Affairs (Mr. Basford) to convey my remarks to the Minister of National Health and Welfare, but I am not here to honour him, nor to bestow honours on myself. I am here to obtain an answer to an important question. Neither the minister nor his delegate is here and to give some answer and I submit, this, constitutes a breach of privilege. There is no sense in my simply putting my remarks on the record. I ask your advice, sir. What should I do in the circumstances?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Béchard): If it is agreeable perhaps we might proceed with question no. 3.

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

CONSUMER AFFAIRS—SUGGESTION BY LOBLAW
PRESIDENT TO BOYCOTT BEEF PURCHASES

Mr. James A. McGrath (St. John's East): Mr. Speaker, great interest has been aroused in the house over the matter I am about to raise. Today, I directed a question to the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs (Mr. Basford). The Speaker did not see fit to allow the minister to answer my question at that time. In my view it was a very serious question. It was in connection with a Canadian press dispatch which appears in today's press. This article quotes the President of Loblaw Groceries Company Limited as calling for a consumer boycott of steaks and roasts to force down prices which have increased up to 40 per cent in the last four weeks. This is a very serious matter, affecting the consumers of this country who are already concerned about the rising cost of living. It is equally serious to have the president of a large retail grocery chain invite the consumers to boycott products which he is selling in his store.

● (10:00 p.m.)

The purpose of my question is to solicit from the minister his reaction and the reaction of his department to this statement and the factors leading up to it. There are a number of things which contribute to the cost of any product. I understand the price of beef to the consumer has risen in the last six weeks by approximately 25 per cent. I understand it rose from an average of 29 cents a hundred-weight for beef on the hoof to 38 cents a hundredweight. A contributing factor to this

[Mr. Basford.]

rise has been an undue demand in the overall beef market in North America. It raises a very serious question. All hon. members are concerned with the rising cost of living and the continuing increase in the consumer price index in Canada. For example, the consumer price index for Canada advanced by 1.1 per cent in April over what it was in March. It continues to rise, notwithstanding the moves that have been made by the new Department of Consumer and Corporate Affairs.

On May 20th, the Minister announced the appointment of the Prices and Incomes Commission. Prior to that, the Consumers' Advisory Council was set up. A white paper was presented to the house last year on the policies for price stability. The minister in a speech to the Canadian Manufacturers' Association, stated, and I quote:

After 18 months in business, we now have the organizational strength and determination to make the contribution which the Economic Council spoke of—to make our impact on the Canadian economy.

In the same speech the minister stated:

By establishing the department in December, 1967, and greatly strengthening it in July, 1968, the government endeavoured to overcome this lack of coordination and to give a common thrust—a common purpose—a common enthusiasm to different agencies that had often been the unloved orphans of other departments.

I would like to hear the minister enunciate this handsome dividend. What, in fact, does this mean to the consumer who is concerned about the way he is being robbed by inflation and about the rising cost of living right across this country? We hope the minister will be able to tell us tonight why the president of a large retail grocery chain would find it proper to make this statement, a most unusual statement for a man in his position, calling upon the consumers of Canada to boycott certain cuts of Canadian beef because of what he claims to be a 40 per cent increase in the last four weeks. Mr. Speaker, this is a serious matter. We would like to know, for example, what the Consumers Advisory Council has to say about this and we would like to know what the minister has to say about it. Perhaps now might be an appropriate time for the minister to say what he has to say.

Hon. Ron Basford (Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs): In the three minutes which are allotted to me to reply to the hon. member's question, I cannot deal with all the points he has raised. I appreciate his having raised this matter. I agree with him and I applaud Mr. Weinstein's suggestion that consumers should boycott steaks and roasts to