

Food Prices Committee

co-operative attitude to the deliberations of the committee in the hope, vain though it may prove to be, that some glimmer of policy change might become so apparent to the public that even this government may move in a direct, quick and efficient way. But we do have conditions. First, we believe the committee should be exclusively a House of Commons committee.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Lawrence: I shall be moving an amendment to strike out all reference to membership on the committee from the other place.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Lawrence: Our purpose, unlike that of my NDP friends, is not to slander the involvement of individual members of the Senate—

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Lawrence:—but rather to give that body the opportunity to perform a responsibility in this current crisis for which it is better suited at the moment. A House of Commons committee under current conditions must stay in Ottawa. A House of Commons committee should work toward immediate and perhaps even short-term solutions. A House of Commons committee should reflect exclusively the party membership ratio of the present House of Commons.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Lawrence: This still leaves the Senate free—and indeed I urge it to do so—to set up its own inquiry, drawing on the wisdom, experience and connections which so many of the members of that body appear to have—

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

An hon. Member: Some connection!

Mr. Lawrence:—in order to look into the more long-term, permanent answers to this chronic and constant problem of inflation. That committee could travel around the country. We could not. The Senate committee could undertake a more in-depth study and take a more leisurely pace which is perhaps more suited to its method of work than that of this parliament and that which the country would expect from us.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Lawrence: We also feel that the past history of joint parliamentary committees is not something of which to be particularly proud. The past history I have been able to ascertain shows that most joint parliamentary committees have been neither as productive nor as fast in respect of their recommendations as both the nature of the problem and the time element require in this case.

None of the five joint parliamentary committees appointed by the Twenty-seventh Parliament completed their meetings within half a year; in fact, most took longer. The average time consumed in meetings of these committees was eleven months. The major joint parlia-

[Mr. Lawrence.]

mentary committee of the Twenty-eighth Parliament held meetings over a period of two years before it completed its deliberations. The Joint Committee on Consumer Credit and Food Prices, which sat during 1966 and 1967, took three months before submitting even an interim report. I say that these time periods are too long. The 1967 Royal Commission on the Rise of Food Prices took a year to publish its findings. Indeed, the subject has been so well researched, investigated, commissioned, inquired into and so committed to death that apart from the argument about whether or not we should even have the committee, it is apparent that a time limit should be imposed on our committee forcing it to report within three months.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Lawrence: In addition, we feel very definitely that our committee should not cover old ground which previous committees have ploughed. Its historical research inquiry should date back only to the point at which the previous joint committee left off in 1966. My colleagues on this side of the House will be presenting in due course amendments to cover these points as the debate progresses. We feel that the current party representation on the Miscellaneous Estimates Committee properly reflects the partisan make-up of this House and should be a precedent for this committee. Therefore, an amendment will be moved later to the effect that the total number of members on the committee be 19, not 20. As a result, we would have eight members from the government benches, eight from the official opposition, two members from the party to my left, and one member from the Creditiste party. This is in accordance with the present make-up of the Miscellaneous Estimates Committee and, we think, more properly represents the party membership in the House.

• (1530)

Finally, an amendment restricting the choice of staff and counsel will be made by one of my colleagues in the belief that everything possible should be done to get this committee working as quickly as feasible. If this is the government's only answer to inflation—and it seems to be—we think much more could and should be done, but we do want to be co-operative and we do want to get cracking on it. Certain restrictions on the choice of staff will, therefore, be suggested later in an amendment from our side.

The sooner the debate is over, the sooner the committee will get to work. While we do have these amendments, we are quite willing to limit ourselves, providing the other parties do so, to one speaker per amendment in respect of this debate and this motion. Of course, if any of the other parties put up more than one speaker per amendment, we have many speakers, believe me, who are burning with desire to get into the discussion and we will have these members speak in the debate.

I move, seconded by the hon. member for Perth-Wilmot (Mr. Jarvis):

That the motion be amended by striking out