

*Adjournment Debate*

to the rising food prices. He replied in the following words:

So if prices are going through the roof, you have a very low roof.

Shades of Marie Antoinette! I may say, Mr. Speaker, that this was one of the reasons the present government met defeat in our province. It was not because of bilingualism but because of high food prices and the high cost of living for people in low income groups. This is why I am concerned about the setting up of a committee to study this problem, and I hope that the message reached the government.

I know there was some gossip that when this committee was formed it was the intention of the government to form it merely to prove to Canadian consumers that they were not being ripped-off. If there is a disposition to set up such a committee for the purpose of proving that the Canadian consumers are living in the best of possible worlds so far as food prices are concerned, and that weather and market conditions will combine to set everything to rights very shortly should there be a temporary aberration, I say that our party will not support that kind of thing.

We are convinced that rising food prices should be investigated. What we need this time is a probe with a purpose, and that purpose must be action. In the four years since the Trudeau government took office, the cost of living has gone up by 20 per cent. A very large part of that rise in the cost of living was due to food prices. Last year alone, food prices went up by 7.4 per cent, and other prices comprising the consumer cost of living index went up by 3.7 per cent.

As a member of the former committee which studied prices, I want to say that almost six years—it will be six years in April—have passed since the tabling of the report of the committee. It is true that certain recommendations of the committee have been met, but some of the most serious questions which were raised at that time have not yet been dealt with. Not all of them were raised in the form of a recommendation.

At the end of our time in that committee certain startling discoveries came to light. I should like to quote part of the committee's report as follows:

Your committee uncovered specific evidence of great concentration of market power. It came to public attention as a result of questions by your committee and disclosed more particularly the so-called Weston empire.

This disclosure was an astonishing revelation and the enormity of the Weston complex surprised even the sophisticated. The far-reaching implications will take some time to assess. The Weston empire reveals for the first time vast holdings and control over food and other related aspects of the economy which will need further investigation to reveal all the implications and to do this, more specific information will of course, be required.

We also pointed out that advertising and promotion had not received our attention in the measure that was required. We said:

The domination of a few large corporations in some sectors of the Canadian economy is clearly evident and gives rise to the question, "is this in the public interest?" Your committee feels that the implications of this question must be fully examined.

[Mrs. MacInnis.]

Our recommendation was as follows:

That the Joint Committee on Consumer Credit (Prices) continue with its investigation of concentration in the food industry.

So far as we in this party are concerned, this is where this committee will begin, with a continuation of the investigation. We in the committee did not get very far with regard to the concentration of monopoly power in the food industry. I want to echo what my colleague pointed out last night, namely, that in our opinion this committee should be established as a special committee of the House. We do not believe in naming people to the committee who are not subject to the control of the electors of this country. We want a House of Commons committee. We believe we in this House could do a better job and better study the concentration of monopoly power. If members in the other place want to be active on the committee, let them come as witnesses, as my leader said, with the concentration of power which a great many of them bring from the corporations they represent.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Laniel):** Order, please.

**Mrs. MacInnis:** I believe I have made my point, Mr. Speaker.

**Hon. Herb Gray (Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to inform the House that late this afternoon I submitted to the Clerk a notice of motion for the setting up of a parliamentary committee to inquire into food prices. Assuming that this was done within the proper time period, the notice of motion should appear on the order paper tomorrow. I hope it will be possible to call the motion in question for debate very soon after the conclusion of the debate on the address in reply to the Speech from the Throne.

During the debate on this motion it will be possible to go into the matter of the composition of the committee and its terms of reference in great detail, and if the House supports the motion the committee will be created, and once organized it can begin its important work.

I am sure that all members of the House, and Canadian people generally, look forward to this work being undertaken soon in the interests of Canada generally.

SPORTS—MONTREAL OLYMPIC GAMES, 1976—  
CIRCUMSTANCE OF SALE OF TELEVISION RIGHTS TO  
AMERICAN BROADCASTING COMPANY

**Mr. Heath Macquarrie (Hillsborough):** Mr. Speaker, I am not at all sure who is going to pronounce the benediction to my nocturnal sermonette, because when I asked a question of the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Lalonde) regarding this matter he said it was not his responsibility, and I do not see the Minister of State for Urban Affairs (Mr. Basford) here.

I should like to say first that I rarely make corrections to *Hansard*, but I did not say of the minister that he has moved from the black to the green chamber; I said that I welcome him from the back room to the green chamber. I was not trying to be more colourful than those who call him a grey eminence.