

and I wonder how the producers live. I would not consider it too great a hardship to live on chicken and turkey for a while instead of beef.

May I say in conclusion that this is a real problem with which we must grapple and which we must solve, but this is something that all Canadian people must feel and on which they must co-operate. The minister has done all he can at the moment, but if we do not get some co-operation with respect to these wage demands, we may have no alternative at some point in the future but to fix rentals, prices and wages.

Mr. Steven E. Paproski (Edmonton Centre): First, I should like to congratulate the minister on his and Mrs. Basford's addition to the family of little Master Basford. I think it is quite commendable, and we on this side are looking forward to those 5 cent cigars.

Never have I listened to such arrogance and conceit as I have listened to today from the minister who claims that he is highly sensitive to the poor who, he claims, are unable to talk for themselves and who cannot protect themselves against higher prices. This is why this motion is particularly appropriate at a time when the cost of living weighs heavily on every Canadian. It is particularly appropriate at a time when the government has demonstrated a complete lack of interest in the fate of ordinary Canadians forced to pay more and more for less and less. It is appropriate at a time when Canadians are forced to run harder and harder to stay where they were a year or two years ago. The costs borne by the consumer, the householder, the homemaker and the salaried wage earner have gone up and up, while salaries have not kept pace. Nobody knows this better than the minister. Nobody cares less than the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau).

What is the use of this kind of motion? Is it going to produce any action from the government? I doubt it. The government must know what the situation is. They have been told about it for the past three years. We have been telling them about it and so have other opposition parties. In the face of high interest rates, prices that are way out of line, rising costs, and increased competition from abroad, the government has shown a total lack of interest. In the face of an increase in consumer prices of something in the nature of 14 per cent in the past three years, the government has done little to show its awareness of the problem.

Failure to Reduce Prices to Consumers

We have had a Department of Consumer and Corporate Affairs. It was established with tremendous fanfare. With equal fanfare the minister set up a committee before which there was a parade of witnesses, each of whom disclaimed any responsibility for what is happening. Somebody somewhere is taking a rake-off. The minister was not able to establish who it was. Surely, the minister cannot pretend that his department has been a success. The facts and figures speak for themselves. We have seen the greatest increases in prices and costs in Canada's peacetime history. This speaks for itself. The minister cannot show that his department has been instrumental in saving the consumer a single penny. He certainly cannot demonstrate that his department has been instrumental in holding down prices. If he had done so effectively, Canadian consumers would not find themselves in their present position.

● (8:20 p.m.)

As one surveys the whole spectrum of price and cost increases, one finds there is hardly an area in which consumers are not obliged to pay a great deal more now than they did when this government came to office. The tragedy is not that the government has failed to take action, the real tragedy is that the government doesn't give a damn.

Never were truer words spoken than those uttered by the former minister of transport (Mr. Hellyer) when he said, with a great light dawning, that this government was incapable of dealing with the nuts and bolts issues. I do not intend to repeat at length his great panegyric, one which gained the admiration of thinking people everywhere, but in the course of it he placed an expert finger on the real weakness of the government. It began as a government divorced from the people. It is now a government divorced from reality. It is a government which has occupied its time and the time of this house chasing the will-o-the-wisp of medico-socio tinkering while the people who voted it into power could not make ends meet.

Last week, while interest rates took another giant step upward with the full approval of the government, the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) was prepared to carve up the constitution like a chicken and hand it trussed up on a plate to Ontario and Quebec. Only a couple of weeks ago the Minister of Finance (Mr. Benson) brought down a theoretical budget which continued the iniquitous 3 per cent surtax and placed a freeze on development in