

Monetary Times

Trade Review and Insurance Chronicle
of Canada

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THE COST OF LIVING COMMITTEE

THE Dominion Government has appointed a Special Committee of the House of Commons to investigate the cost of living. There is already a Cost of Living Commissioner who is an executive officer in the department of labor. The work of the Commons Committee will, according to the plans, be extensive and will include not only an investigation into the cost of essential commodities such as food stuffs, but of many other articles. The actual results attained cannot, of course, be very great as the causes which are responsible for the present scale of prices are beyond the control of the Canadian or any other individual government. The existence of this committee, however, and the publicity which will accompany its work, should be an important factor in impressing upon the public the fact that undue profits in Canada constitute an insignificant factor in retail prices. It is unfortunate that so much attention has been devoted to a few instances of large profits while the numerous companies which are in difficult financial circumstances are entirely overlooked.

The discussion which took place in the House of Commons on June 4th, in connection with the organization of this committee, indicates the wide range of causes which are held to be responsible for the present difficulty. George B. Nicholson, East Algoma, who was elected chairman, said that if the committee is to do anything to settle the unrest in the country because of the high cost of living, it would be necessary to get at the causes of present high prices, and let the people know what they are. The inquiry, Mr. Nicholson said, should be wide open and confined to definite lines. A. B. McCoig, Kent, asked if Mr. Nicholson meant that if the committee finds out the cause of the high cost of things it should take steps to bring about a change. Mr. Nicholson having replied in the affirmative, Mr. McCoig suggested the appearance before the committee of the sales agents of the International Harvester Company and the Advance-Rumley Company, of Winnipeg, to explain the sale of a number of tractors, which he said, were sold at higher prices than should have been asked in view of the fact that the government has been bringing tractors into the country, and at low cost, in order to encourage production.

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H. H. Stevens, Centre Vancouver, after pointing out that it would be impossible for the inquiry to cover a wide range during the remaining days of the session, moved a resolution suggesting that the Boards of Trade in all the larger industrial centres of Canada should be asked to appoint a committee to supply the committee of inquiry with information relating to retail and wholesale prices. Mr. Stevens thought the committee should devote particular attention to the matter of the spread of prices between the manufacturer and the consumer. Mr. Stevens' proposal met with considerable opposition on the score that the Boards of Trade would not act. E. W. Nesbitt (N. Oxford) expressed the opinion that the proper way to proceed was to send for the manufacturers, wholesalers and retailers to give evidence. Jas. Douglas, Strathcona, said the committee should be given power to bring in a report before the House prorogues, and a full report at the fall session if one is held. After further discussion, Mr. Stevens' resolution was adopted in the following form:—

"That, with a view to assisting this Committee, we request the Mayors of the following cities, viz.: Halifax, St. John, Quebec, Montreal, Toronto, Hamilton, Fort William, Port Arthur, Winnipeg, Regina, Calgary, Edmonton, Vancouver and Victoria, to form a committee consisting of the presidents of the Boards of Trade, presidents of the Trades and Labor Councils, presidents of G.W.V.A., and two representatives of women's organizations, or such persons as the foregoing organizations may appoint.

"Such committees to ascertain the base cost to importer or manufacturer of following staple articles: boots and shoes, ordinary articles of clothing, meats and meat products of packing companies, fresh and cured, flour and cereals, coal, silk, and bread; also average rentals for residents of working classes; also average general rate of bank interest on commercial paper, also the ultimate retail prices charged in ordinary retail stores, to consumers, delivered, of such articles.

"That the above committee be asked to perform the above duties as an emergency public service, to assist the committee in its work.

"That the object is to find out the spread between the original producer of common articles of necessities of life and the price charged the consumer. That these committees be asked to report as early as possible on these items, and to furnish subsequently such other information as they may desire."