

Increasing Food Prices

government is to do for a community of people whatever they need to have done but cannot do for themselves. At that time, the community's need was for roads, railways, the links of trade and commerce and for the productive machinery of the country. And, the government provided these things, or saw that they were provided by offering incentives and assistance to those who could provide them. Today, our Canadian community of people needs new forms of help, and it is about one of these that our motion today is concerned.

During the second World War, the leaders of the western world promulgated the Atlantic Charter. There was much interest in that charter. It refers to the four freedoms, the freedom of speech, the freedom of religion, the freedom from hunger and the freedom from fear. At that time we were somewhat complacent about freedom from hunger and freedom from fear. Particularly, freedom from hunger was far from our minds. We thought it concerned only those countries on the other side of the world which were undeveloped and not experiencing the benefits of the most abundant economy imaginable. Expressing this positively, let me say that the right to enough good food, which is necessary for proper health and energy, is a right which thousands and thousands of our Canadian people are still denied. So, they are denied the third freedom, the freedom from hunger, in the sense that they cannot afford a diet which will bring about proper health and energy. This freedom has still to be won for thousands of people in our country.

The government has now embarked on a survey of nutrition across Canada. That is an excellent idea. May I point out that the survey will not be completed until near the end of this year and will not be available until some time in 1973. I predict that the findings of this survey, when published, will be very similar to the findings of a similar, American survey. In this connection may I quote from the White House conference on Food, Nutrition and Health, Summary Report of January, 1971:

One of the basic causes of malnutrition and hunger in the United States is poverty. Millions of Americans of all ages and in all parts of the nation simply do not have enough money to buy what they need in order to live healthy, productive lives.

• (1520)

If you doubt whether that also applies to Canada on the scale which Canada bears to the United States, let me remind you of the 1970 submission to the Senate Committee on Poverty by the Quebec Corporation of Professional Workers which found infant mortality in the poverty stricken areas of Montreal 35.1 per 1,000, twice that of other areas. It found one third of grade one poor children undernourished and one half suffering from emotional problems. It found three times as many of them with intelligence quotients under 80. Low intelligence, as explained in another 1970 report, can be accounted for by undernourishment. A child who is undernourished in his first months of life or whose mother is undernourished during pregnancy has less than the normal rate of cell division and ends up with fewer brain cells.

As the Castonguay report of 1970 put it, and I quote:

A great lack of food during the first 18 months of a child's life prevents a normal cerebral development.

[Mrs. MacInnis.]

That, Mr. Speaker, means for life. Montreal is the largest city in Canada. The second largest is Toronto. A study in 1969-70 by Dr. Ursula Anderson of the Hospital for Sick Children disclosed that children in the poorest areas of Toronto were three times more likely to die in infancy than those in the richest areas. Vancouver is the third largest city in Canada. Last August the Vancouver *Sun* ran a series of articles on the welfare system in British Columbia. A reporter asked one mother and I quote:

How do you make do with four growing boys and a welfare cheque of \$257 a month?

She replied:

Towards the end of the month we cut down on food. We eat mostly soup and potatoes—we eat a lot of potatoes. We eat meat—oh, sometimes once a week. It is hard to make the food budget stretch—especially when you have boys.

Her boys were aged 10, 13, 15 and 16. What that kind of diet will do to their health in future years does not bear thinking about. When we consider that the farmers of this country are today getting less than half of the consumer dollar for food, we begin to realize that there are forces at work, forces that would not have been at work in the old days when farmers grew the food and sold it directly to the stores. Nor are people in dire poverty and on social assistance the only ones to suffer now. Large sections of elderly people on low fixed incomes and handicapped people like the blind, thousands of ordinary families from the Atlantic to the Pacific, simply cannot stretch their budgets to provide enough good food for health and energy. The job is getting harder and harder.

The government recognized that budgets were not enough for a decent life when, in their own budget this year, they provided some stretching for the old age pensioners and full time students. They then went on with a separate measure to assist in some way the veterans of this country. They knew perfectly well that many people's budgets will not stretch to provide a proper standard of living in this country. They knew that when they gave those tiny bits of relief in the tax bill last fall. But they are not prepared to come to grips with what is really going on in the undermining of the food and living standards of the Canadian homes across this country.

Economists generally agree that prices should not rise more than 2 per cent a year in order to have relatively stable prices. However, from February, 1971 to February, 1972, they rose almost two and one half times that desirable figure. Food prices rose by nearly 7.5 per cent from April, 1971 to April 1972, more than twice as much as the cost of living generally. Why is that important? It is important because food is the rock-bottom element in the living standard for people.

When we realize that people do not have enough to buy the proper food they need for health, nourishment and proper nutrition, we see that there is something very rotten, not in the state of Denmark in this instance, but in Canada. This steady and stealthy advance in food costs represents a direct assault on the living standards of the Canadian people. We are not doing a thing about it in this House. I am not crying about the rising cost of caviar, pickled snails or truffles. People who like these things are well able to take care of them in their budgets. People who ordinarily buy these things have the money to cover