

*Summer Recess*

a couple of letters into the record which I received recently from constituents in the riding of the Minister of Finance (Mr. MacEachen)—while the mails were still operating. The first one says:

I wrote to the Prime Minister, the Deputy Prime Minister . . . and to the head of Canada Mortgage and Housing in Halifax with no answer from any of them, so I decided to write to you.

**Mr. Clark:** And they didn't even answer?

**Miss MacDonald:** No, they did not even answer.

My mortgage has gone up from \$183 to \$408, a month. I am the mother of eight children, five children in junior and high school, two in vocational school and one at home. My grocery order a week is \$160. My oil is \$135 every four weeks, house payments \$408, not counting gas, lights, water, car payment and other bills. We are finding it very hard to make ends meet. We only signed our mortgage renewal for only one year and when it comes up we will be looking at another big jump. We signed the mortgage renewal with no other choice. We signed or be put out on the street with no concern for the children. Where can you find a place to rent for ten people? My husband's take-home pay is \$230-\$240 per week after taxes. It does not leave much for clothes for the children after everything is paid. I don't know what the government expects of miners. Everything is going up but the take-home pay . . . The going is rough with eight children and I know they are going without to make the house payment.

That letter comes from a Mrs. Campbell who lives in the riding of the Minister of Finance.

I have another letter in front of me from someone else in the minister's riding. It says:

I have written to so many people in government concerning my financial problems that I am fed up with them all . . . and no one can lift a hand to change matters, I end up with the same old answers. They try to run our country but they couldn't run a dog show.

**Some hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Miss MacDonald:** The letter goes on:

I am a widow woman with four children to try and look after on a pension of \$480 per month social assistance. I am nearly crazy trying to make ends meet. I have a 20-year-old son who has tried everywhere for work but can't find a job. I have a daughter 18 who is graduating in June and she has gone everywhere she can think of for a job and she ends up baby-sitting for \$45 a week. Then my 14-year-old son is trying to get any small jobs, mowing lawns or cleaning yards or whatever he gets in the way of an odd job. My little girl, 11, is here with no shoes for her feet and I just cannot afford to get her any . . .

Four years ago we were getting \$425 a month and I could buy a 3-lb jar of peanut butter for \$1.89. Now I get \$480 a month and the same jar of peanut butter is \$5.30 and that's no lie. My fuel bill four years ago was around \$40 a month, now its over \$100. A family of five should have at least \$100 a week for food alone, not to mention your fuel, lights, clothes, bills and other necessities . . .

Its not living when you are worried every minute where your next meal is coming from.

That letter was from Mrs. MacMullen from the minister's riding. The letters I have referred to, Mr. Speaker, reached me in June while we still had postal service. Their writers, who voiced despair at the situation a month ago, now must contend with the highest increase in the cost of living in our peacetime history. What can you say to a mother with a number of children when you know she cannot afford the increase in the cost of milk, fresh fruit and vegetables for her children? These people do not write letters to members of Parliament because they are looking for penpals. They write because they are hoping and praying that someone will listen to their cries of

distress. It is no good for the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Miss Bégin) to shake her head at me—these are the kinds of things people write about.

Cabinet ministers have not listened through these last long months. They are confronted with this situation again and again, and still they do not listen. They have sat in their seats in stony silence, or they have risen to their feet to intone that Canadians have never had it so good. Small comfort, that, to a woman with a family of young children for whom she must provide.

● (2330)

If cabinet ministers have not listened to the pleas of the less fortunate while the House has been in session, if they have not listened in this last number of months, who will force them to listen to anything in the next three months when we are not here? They relish the chance to get rid of the opposition confronting them with their shortcomings. They do not like to be confronted with these shortcomings, and they jump at every opportunity to get rid of them. However, during this debate today one does not hear from any of the Liberal backbenchers getting up on their feet to demand, from their Liberal cabinet ministers, some countermeasure to the high cost of living about which we have heard today. We have not heard a single word from any Liberal backbencher about it. Instead, like the cabinet, they have ceased to listen, and that is the trouble.

In the past year the government has made a mess of constitutional reform, it has made a mess of the economy, and it has made a mess of the Post Office. I just want to plead with the government: for God's sake, please do not touch anything else, because your incompetence is ruining the country.

**Some hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Miss MacDonald:** I say to Your Honour that the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) has a great opportunity in these next few days. He has an opportunity to listen and to learn from the leaders of other industrialized countries. He might ask them how they are handling inflation, how they are handling the cost of living in their countries, and what their record has been over the past year. This is what he would hear from them. He would hear that in Italy the cost of living has gone down from a year ago, when it was 20.8 per cent, to 20.6 per cent. In France it has gone down from 13.7 per cent to 12.7 per cent. In Britain it has gone down from 21.9 per cent to 11.7 per cent. In the United States it has gone down from 14.4 per cent to 9.8 per cent. In West Germany it has gone down from 6 per cent to 5.6 per cent. In Japan it has gone down from 8.2 per cent to 5.4 per cent. In Canada it has gone up from 9.4 per cent to 12.8 per cent.

**Some hon. Members:** Shame! Shame!

**Miss MacDonald:** That is what the Prime Minister has to bring to the economic Summit. Canada is the only country at the economic Summit to show an increase in the cost of living over the past year. All the other countries have reversed the trend. The Minister of Finance and his Minister of State for