

public, references to undue increases, and so on, have been used for years in our statute books. After a detailed look at the facts it is possible to define whether the public is being gouged, and then there would be an obligation on the person who was raising prices, rents, or whatever it is, to explain and to justify the raise. Then if there was no clear justification for the increase that had been imposed, I suggest it would be possible to make an assessment and to do something about it. For example, in the case I mentioned in my constituency of an increase in rent in one month of from \$130 to \$300, such increase could not be imagined to be justifiable. If the battle against inflation is to be real and not just window-dressing, then better measures are required. The government must seek from parliament the teeth necessary to enforce stabilization of prices.

• (2120)

One other matter I want to mention is this. I find in the service centre which I operate, and to which many of my constituents come for advice, one of the major complaints of the older people, the senior citizens, about the present increased cost of living relates to the cost of prescription drugs. They point out that they have an increase, and it is welcomed, of \$5 and a few cents in their basic pensions, or a little more than that in the case of those who receive the guaranteed income supplement, but they often have to pay \$20 for prescription drugs, the price of which is not controlled.

I understand that three provincial governments in Canada are providing prescription drugs free, and I am pleased to say they are British Columbia, Manitoba and Saskatchewan. I recommend to the federal government that it look into this matter, and if it is concerned about the impact of the cost of living on elderly people it will do something about providing prescription drugs free to old age pensioners.

My last point, Mr. Speaker, is this. As an anti-inflation measure the government should again take a leaf out of the New Democratic Party's program. At its convention last July in Vancouver—

Mr. Turner (Ottawa-Carleton): Why don't you come to our convention, Andy, and really learn where it's at?

Mr. Brewin: If you take up this suggestion, I may even come to your convention.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Brewin: At that convention the NDP undertook to provide shelter allowances to make up the difference between a family's rental cost and what it can reasonably afford. Shelter allowances would be paid to people over 60, to the disabled and to families on moderate income with a large number of children. After all, housing is a basic human right, like food, and if the community can accept the principle of subsidizing essential foods it can accept the principle of subsidizing equally important shelter in this relatively affluent age.

I commend to this government the proposition that the time has come for rent controls, the time has come to take the high cost of prescription drugs off the backs of old age pensioners, and the time has come for some sort of shelter

Cost of Living

allowance. I am glad that the government has moved toward consideration of these victims of inflation, and if it will take seriously the proposals I have made it will be doing even better.

[*Translation*]

Mr. René Matte (Champlain): Mr. Speaker, the motion under consideration tonight is obviously of the utmost importance since the whole of Canada is facing today the many problems of increases in prices, costs and wages. In fact, we are in such a position that we must find adequate solutions.

Now, if we look into such problems and if we try to find out the real reasons which have brought about the present situation, we shall probably discover many other factors liable to figure out in what way could abuses be redressed and a positive solution be brought up.

Among these real reasons, Mr. Speaker, there is one that could embody all others, that is, we keep on trying to administer while being satisfied with an inadequate system. We would never have to talk about inflation or uncontrolled increase in the cost of living if the present financial system did not create or encourage abuses.

While the motion under consideration states that according to Statistics Canada figures reveal a disastrous situation, and points out interest rate increases, we hit one of the main causes of today's problems. As a matter of fact, the increase in interest rates that we always denounced is one of the main causes of all the others. At a time when production of the consumer goods we need is encouraged, we have to resort to credits, to borrowing. Of course the rates of interest will be reflected in the cost of producing consumer goods and that is, I believe, the source of all the other difficulties that are linked to one another.

Now, if we had an effective means of controlling the increase in the rate of interest, we could solve, at least partially, a good number of those problems.

Here are the other main causes of the present situation: We unfortunately let monopolies do as they please; we accept too easily that some individuals or some companies bring about such an increase in prices. And if I may quote one example from the constituency I have the honour to represent, namely that of Champlain, let me say that there are a good many potato producers who could sell their product at a very reasonable price to the consumer, while getting also a reasonable income out of it.

But what happens in the distribution of those goods and, as in the present instance, in the distribution of those potatoes? Who looks after that distribution? Therefore what happens is simply this: only one dealer will buy in advance the whole potato crop from certain producers and will then impose the selling price he wants and that at the expense of the consumer as well as of the producer. And that is why we pay \$5, \$6 or even \$7 for a 75-pound potato bag, while the producer would have received only 60 cents, 75 cents or a \$1 at the most.

One of the main reasons is that we allow some individuals to control, small, average or large monopolies and afterwards to dictate their price to consumers.

If we are looking for real solutions following an analysis of the causes of those inflationary thrust, we obviously