

of Canada have rejected price and wage controls as a solution. They say:

"It has been repeatedly demonstrated that controls are ineffective in an overheated economy and the recent American experience with the price freeze, especially in so far as it applies to food prices, has shown the futility of such attempts".

But the Conservatives are so tied to United States policies than when the Americans run out phases the Tories will run out of policies. They have no real policy. It has been rejected by economists; it has been rejected by all other parties. Yet the Tories insist on adhering to this policy. They must know that it will not work. One of their financial critics wrote a book in which he set forth why it will not work. I cannot understand why they persist in adhering to it. Perhaps it is for no other reason than that it might win them some votes. But they are gradually coming around to recognition of the value of a prices review board.

We look at the government's policy and we see a party which was triumphant in 1968 doing nothing. This government does things only on the basis of crisis. Then it does something only if it is pushed. Everything that is done is done on the basis of "ad hockery." We have as examples LIP, OFY and DREE. These programs were all brought in to solve a situation which arose in a crisis. They did not work. Any policy with any solidity to it was forced upon them by you know who—us. From the start the Prices Review Board was asked for by our party. It was the brainchild of our party; it was our idea. What did we get? We got Mrs. Plumptre. We got evasion and crocodile tears from a government which is frightened of its own shadow and refuses to heed the warning of the people that it received last October 30.

While this government vacillates, the rising cost of living is eating up the meagre pensions and wages of millions of concerned Canadians. I think it is significant that in the speeches of the financial critics of both major parties there is always a token mention of pensioners and people on fixed incomes. The government ought to be aware, if it is not aware, that the privation which has heretofore been confined pretty well to people on low incomes is now creeping upward to the higher wage brackets, and when that happens the people of Canada will come to know which is the only party in this House that has any kind of a policy to alleviate the distress of inflation.

But I am afraid that until the Canadian people are ready to recognize that fact we can only hope, by continued pressure, to get some kind of action from this government. I think this House can be assured that that pressure will be exerted unremittingly by this party.

Mr. Bell: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. There has been further discussion and I think there is a desire now that we reduce the length of speeches to 15 minutes. I also express the hope that at around ten o'clock, due to the great number of members who wish to take part in this national emergency debate, we will be able to reduce the time to about ten minutes.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Is it agreed that at least until 10 p.m. speeches be limited to 15 minutes?

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

Cost of Living

Mr. James A. McGrath (St. John's East): Mr. Speaker, we meet here in emergency debate, but one would never believe it from the attendance on the treasury benches.

An hon. Member: Why don't you look at your own benches?

Mr. McGrath: We can only conclude that the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau), the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs (Mr. Gray), the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Whelan), the Minister of Finance (Mr. Turner) and all the other ministers responsible for various areas of the subject matter under debate must be down at the Chateau Laurier dining and dining with the partisans of the Liberal party from across the country, at a time when Canada has experienced the highest increase in the cost of living in 22 years. Food prices increased during the past year by 16.2 per cent. In this month food prices have increased by 3.2 per cent.

Notwithstanding the announcement made in the House on September 4 by the Prime Minister, and the measures debated and adopted by this House in the last few days, the fact is that the government has not presented to this parliament any program, any policy to deal with the most serious problem facing this country today, runaway inflation.

When this parliament opened on January 4 there was an announcement in the Speech from the Throne that the government would take measures to reduce inflation, to reduce unemployment and to set up a special committee on food prices. Well, we have the special committee on food prices—and we have high unemployment and runaway inflation. The only answer the government has had, apart from the stopgap measures announced by the Prime Minister in the House on September 4, to the whole problem of rising prices and runaway inflation is the establishment of the Special Committee on Trends in Food Prices. What is the record of that committee? Its recommendations have been largely ignored by this government.

Today, the greatest indignity of all in respect of that committee was the refusal of the Prime Minister to accept an invitation, passed by the majority of the committee, to appear before it to explain the statement he made to the House on September 4 and to submit himself to questioning by members of the committee. This is a special committee of the House, not a standing committee. It is a special committee created by the government as the government's answer to inflation.

The Prime Minister, in his letter to the chairman of the committee, referred to the fact that the Prime Minister obviously cannot be concerned with appearing before all the committees of the House of Commons. That is understandable because there are many committees of the House which are involved in various areas ranging all the way from estimates to special references from the House. But this is a special committee with a special mandate. It is the government's answer to rising food prices. It is charged with the responsibility of studying trends in food prices. It has the power to call for persons and papers.

● (2020)

The first report of the committee contained recommendations that special legislation be brought in to establish a