

HIGH COST OF LIVING.

THREE years ago as the result of constant pressure the present government appointed a departmental commission to enquire into the High Cost of Living, and make recommendations in connection therewith. The commission submitted its report at the last session of Parliament. But it made no recommendation.

At the annual meeting of the Trade and Labor Congress held in Toronto recently one of the principal resolutions passed by the gathering called for immediate action by the Government to control food prices. On October 13th, a delegation representing Boards of Trade and Councils from all important eastern points; the Union of Canadian Municipalities; the National Council of Women; the Trade and Labor Congress; the Dominion Retailers Association and other prominent bodies waited upon the Government in the House of Commons, and asked that steps be taken by the Federal authorities to control prices. The delegation made a strong appeal based on figures of the cost of living during the past few months.

Sympathy and Nothing Else.

At the conclusion of the hearing **Hon. T. W. Crothers**, Minister of Labor endeavored to console the gathering by stating that prices had increased to a far greater degree in Germany than in Canada, and that as a matter of fact there were few countries in the world where prices were lower than in the Dominion. He thought that the main trouble was with wages. **Hon. Robert Rogers** informed the gathering that **nobody had placed his finger upon a remedy**, and intimated that there was **little that the Government could do**. **Hon. C. J. Doherty**, Minister of Justice declared that **"if someone else would take the initiative"** the Department of Justice would be willing to place all the machinery it had in its possession at their disposal; but that the Department would of itself initiate no investigation. The Delegation received sympathy—but nothing else.

Since then Grocer Associations have made strenuous complaint at the prices being charged by wholesalers. Encouraged no doubt by the Government's stand on the matter, and secure because of the high protection which they enjoy, the Canadian canners have announced increases in various canned goods approximating as high as 100 per cent. Retailers associations have also met in conference and complained loudly concerning prices charged them by the wholesalers. And the National Council of Women has since assembled in Ottawa and passed resolutions favoring control of food prices.

Pressure of public opinion finally brought the Government to a realization that something must be done. A sub-committee of the Cabinet was appointed, consisting of **Hon. C. J. Doherty**, **Hon. Arthur Meighen**, **Hon. T. J. Crothers** and **Hon. Robert Rogers**, to go into the matter and draft an order-in-council which might be calculated to allay the public agitation.

There emanated from this committee a compli-

cated piece of machinery the provisions of which may briefly be summarized as follows:—

Upon the Council of a municipality declaring that excessive prices are being demanded for any necessity of life, it may institute a partial investigation so far as conditions within its boundaries are concerned. **It cannot, however, enforce the attendance of witnesses from outside its boundaries, nor can it penalize those who decline to be examined.**

The Council upon making such investigation may report to the Minister of Labor, that a further and more complete enquiry is necessary; and this may be ordered by the Minister.

If this second investigation is ordered, and it shows that an offence has been committed under the regulations prohibiting the undue raising of prices the facts may be reported to the Attorney-General of the Province "for such action as he may be pleased to institute."

The clumsy, and complicated nature of the machinery is clearly indicated from the above summary. It has already been described by more than one Municipal Council, which has endeavored to take advantage of it, as **"Passing the Responsibility."** The Government to which the people look to see that the cost of food in war time is not unduly enhanced, passes the responsibility to the municipalities, whose powers are limited within their own particular boundaries, and the municipalities then pass the responsibility on to the provincial governments.

In view of the failure several years ago of the Minister of Labor to take any decisive action in connection with the Shoe Machinery Trust, under the Combines Act, little better results may be anticipated from this new and clumsy piece of legislation.

The Government is not at all anxious to probe too deeply into the question of soaring food prices, for fear of what it might find. Many of its own particular friends are making large profits from the handling of food supplies. It would, for instance, be a delicate matter to inquire into the workings of the Canners Combine, which is one of the particular price boosters since the war commenced. Among the Government benches in the House of Commons is to be found the seat of **Francis Ramsey Lalor**, Conservative M.P. for Haldimand. Mr. Lalor is designated in the Parliamentary Guide as "a self-made man." He is one of the particular heads of the Canners Combine aforementioned. So it will be seen that the Government's position in this connection is a delicate one.

It may be interesting in view of the stand taken by the Canadian Government to note what action has been taken by other countries in this respect.

Australia.

In Australia a **Commonwealth Prices Adjustment Board** has been established, with power to summon witnesses, take evidence, enter premises, inspect books, and do everything