

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

HOUSE OF COMMONS, February 10, 1948

The Special Committee on Prices met this day at 8.00 p.m. The Chairman, Hon. Paul Martin, presided.

The CHAIRMAN: Gentlemen, may I say that I consider it an honour, but also a great responsibility, to have been selected to act as chairman of this committee. I thought that it might be worth while to suggest that this committee can bring out the facts about prices in this country. No problem today concerns Canada as much as the cost of living. This committee is widely representative of political opinion in the House of Commons, and I know that all political parties have chosen their members with great care in view of the importance they attach to the questions we have been asked to investigate.

Not only is the prices problem of first importance today but it is also of great urgency. It is because of that urgency that this committee has been called to meet within a few hours of the passage in the House of Commons of the resolution setting it up. I think it will be the intention of every member to see that the work is pushed forward as much as possible in order that all relevant information may be available for parliament and the people of Canada at the earliest possible date.

Our terms of reference are wide and include inquiry into: the causes of increases in living costs; price increases due to profiteering; price increases due to hoarding. I am certain that my role will not be easy, but I know that I will have the co-operation of every one of you. I know that every member of this committee will devote his time to the painstaking investigation of the matters which will come before us. I need hardly say that in our work the considerations which will influence us will be the considerations that are embraced within the terms of reference; namely, that we are going to put aside any considerations other than the one of trying to resolve, in so far as this committee has the power, the problems assigned to us. We want this inquiry to be complete and searching. Our terms of reference authorize us to conduct an investigation of sufficient scope to disclose all the fundamental factors in the rise in prices. Our aim will be to get all the facts and the scope of our inquiry will be nationwide.

I suggest, and it is merely a suggestion, that we may want to establish a firm background of economic facts for our enquiry by having persons who have specialized in the pursuit of these matters to outline to us the basic factors in Canada's present economic position, and such external considerations as may be of direct importance. It may be then, or it may be before, that we will want to put first things first and inquire at once, or shortly thereafter, into the staple commodities of life which I suggest may be deemed to be bread, butter, meat, vegetables, shoes and clothing.

Now, the character of this committee will be determined by the members of this committee and I am sure that they will not permit it to be used as a smoke-screen. They will not permit it to be a means of delaying action. In saying that the facts must be exposed, we should bear in mind that we are not a white-washing committee; nor, on the other hand, should this committee be used to "smear" anyone. This is a fact-finding committee. Our findings will, we trust, have a salutary effect, but no one who has acted fairly in setting prices need fear this investigation. But we should act without fear or favour, and I know that we will.