

THE RETAIL MERCHANTS AT OTTAWA.

A delegation representing the Retail Merchants of Canada, waited upon Mr. W. F. O'Connor, K.C., who is acting for the Dominion Government in the cost of living investigations, at Ottawa, on Monday, and were in conference from 10.30 a.m. until 2.30 p.m.

The merchants represented that in the investigations into the high cost of living now being made, the Minister of Labor acted as though he thought all trade agreements were wrong, and should be crushed. The "questionnaires" which had been received by both wholesalers and retailers, were, the delegation said, very arbitrary in tone, demanding not only the abolition of the fixed price, but of many other usages the merchants had hitherto found acceptable.

The delegation objected to the bill which Mr. Knowles, M.P. for Moose Jaw, Sask., had introduced at Ottawa, making it illegal for any manufacturer, wholesaler or retailer to stipulate or agree that his wares should be sold at a certain fixed price. This measure, they claimed, if adopted, would not reach the real monopolists, but would play into the hands of the mail order houses.

The merchants claimed that the battle is in reality one between the principles of the mail order house and those of the local merchant. They said that while the mail order houses have spent millions of dollars in advertising, through the press and by means of the printed catalogues, the cheapness and efficiency of their service, the retail merchants have never placed their side of the case before the public. The consequence is that the statements made by the mail order houses, to the effect that centralization pays, have been more or less accepted as true. With the centralization of trade and the consequent triumph of the mail order house, the local retail merchants of the towns and the villages would be driven out of business, and the farming and urban communities would be deprived of the convenience of the local store, and compelled to confine themselves to the use of such articles as are suitable for transportation through the Post Office.

COST OF MAKING A SACK OF FLOUR IN ENGLAND.

Five or six years ago it was generally computed that it was possible in a mill, in a favorable situation, worked efficiently, with a modern plant, to make a sack of flour for half-a-crown (60 cents). Before the war costs of manufacture had already begun to rise, and were rising at a rate which was then thought rapid. We shall be within the mark if we say that the expense of making and delivering a sack of flour had increased by a shilling. It was noticeable, even at that time, although it was common knowledge that labor and various materials had gone up in price, there were millers who still calculated, or acted as if they calculated, on a manufacturing cost very little above the old figure. Since war began costs have risen in every direction until we hesitate to name a general figure applicable to the present time. Speaking very generally, and subject to such correction as millers may like to make, we think it will be found that manufacturing costs have certainly risen 50 per cent, as compared with August, 1914. Accordingly, we may suppose that a gross profit, varying for different mills and in different districts, from at the lowest about 4s. 9d. (\$1.14), up to at any rate 6s. (\$1.50) per sack, has now to be obtained before millers can begin to calculate on a net profit. — Milling.

SHERIFF GOES IN FOR SUGAR CULTURE.

Sheriff Inkster has decided to take a hand in reducing the high cost of living by making his fine grove of maples at Seven Oaks contribute to his sugar supply this year. He received a large consignment of sap buckets and spouts recently from the east, and will tap the trees this month. He does not expect to get enough sugar to affect the market, though the sugar barons might get alarmed if apprised of the extent of his venture. The sheriff recalls that in the old fur-trading days the Red Lake Indians made an annual pilgrimage from Northern Minnesota to Fort Garry with a great flotilla of canoes, loaded with maple sugar, which they exchanged for other goods. The sugar brought them better returns than their furs did.—Manitoba Free Press.

The Colonial Secretary in the House of Commons announced (March 29) that arrangements have been made to relax the prohibition on the import of Canadian tinned salmon.

THE VALUE OF SERVICE TO THE PUBLIC. TO AID THE DEBTOR WHO IS INSOLVENT.

Mr. J. A. Beaudry, Treasurer of the Retail Merchants' Association, at the Montreal Weekly Electrical Luncheon.

Increased efficiency was the theme of an interesting address delivered by J. A. Beaudry, Treasurer of the Retail Merchants' Association of Canada, Inc., before the Montreal Electrical Association, at their weekly luncheon at Freeman's last Wednesday.

Mr. Beaudry laid stress upon the fact that, in his opinion, what Canada most requires of every one of her citizens "in these times of war and strife," is increased efficiency. Our need for increased efficiency in each individual is marked at the present time, the speaker said. If wages continue to increase at the present rate without a corresponding increase in efficiency we shall very soon find ourselves unable to compete with Japan and other countries which have cheap labor. Mechanical and not human efficiency accounts for the comparatively low prices of our manufactured articles to-day, but our industries call for human efficiency as well as mechanical perfection if we are to have our share of the world trade.

"The biggest expense in connection with industrial life can be removed by efficiency," said Mr. Beaudry. "I refer to the cost of mistakes; little mistakes often cost very dearly. Germany made a little mistake when she failed to realize that by invading Belgium she was letting loose the British Lion, the Lion which is now pushing back the Germans. So far only the scratch of the Lion's forepaw has been felt and that has drawn blood, but the final mauling and tearing of the double-headed eagle by the Lion is inevitable."

THE HIGH COST LIVING.

Owing to the conditions created by the war, the necessities of life have greatly increased in price, with the result that we are all suffering, continued Mr. Beaudry. The man who could solve the problem of providing the general public with the choicest products at the lowest prices would be doing heroic service. In a country like Canada where one-tenth of the population lives on the island of Montreal and nine-tenths are spread over a territory of 4,000 miles, the distribution problem is a serious one.

At present the wants of the public are catered to by the retail merchants and the mail order house.

The mail order house and the ordinary merchant are governed by two entirely different principles. The mail order house believes in monopolizing and centralizing supplies while the ordinary merchant believes in dissemination which enables him to study the needs of his particular district and enables him to supply the consumers' needs at a few moments notice in such quantities as are required.

The distribution method has been adopted not only for reasons of economy, but for the convenience of the public. A consumer who happens to live at Vancouver does not wish to send to Winnipeg for a bag of salt or a can of pork and beans.

The mail order houses, in order to create the impression that their service is economical, take an article that is well known at a certain price and as an advertising scheme sell that article at a cut rate — often making almost no profit.

Among other causes contributing to the high cost of living are: The campaign for cleanliness, which has swept over the country in recent years and has left in its wake a mania for goods wrapped in waxed paper and packaged instead of in bulk form, and the tendency of manufacturers to make use of the trade mark in marketing their products. In some lines of trade, such as the grocery and drug trades, the trade marked articles that are sold represent over 60 per cent of the turnover.

PAPER WASTE.

Speaking of the amount of paper that is wasted every year and the very commendable efforts which are being made now to curtail it, Hardware and Metal has the following to say:

The average merchant will perhaps be mildly surprised to know that the economic loss occasioned around each store where these stocks (waste paper) are destroyed has been estimated at approximately \$200. One authority in the paper business estimates that the paper wasted by the average merchant has an actual cash value to him of \$100. He further estimates that the loss of time occasioned to the merchant in cleaning up and disposing of this paper amounts to an additional \$100 per year. With these two items there is a clear loss of \$200 per year. The labor that is expended in burning up could just as easily be expended in baling the paper and so bring a financial return to the merchant.

Credit Men Would Avoid Court Proceedings.

Discussing "The Value of Co-operation in Adjusting Weakened Credit Risks," Frank S. Flagg, vice-president of the National Association of Credit Men, told those assembled at the fourth monthly meeting of the New York Credit Men's Association in the Hotel Astor recently that the critical time in the life of a credit was when the debtor became embarrassed or insolvent. Mr. Flagg declared that it was at that time that the prestige and influence of the Credit Men's Association could be made available to the creditors.

Mr. Flagg said, in part:

"I am assuming you are all credit men who are interested not alone in making good credits, but in keeping down to the smallest possible percentage your credit loss expense, a result invariably accomplished by avoiding failures generally, or when you do find yourself interested in a weakened credit risk, to get as near as possible to 100 per cent out of the liquidation or adjustment."

"Some years ago the National Association of Credit Men, realizing the enormous amount of bad debt waste which was leaking through this big gap, gave the subject most careful study and consideration and as a result inaugurated a system of adjustment bureaus and these have proven so efficient and valuable in the handling of insolvent or weakened estates that to-day there are over sixty bureaus in successful operation in the various cities."

"The precise and definite object which your association is seeking to accomplish in this department of its work is to educate the members to the desirability and advantage of utilizing its facilities to the fullest extent for the purpose of holding creditors' meetings at which the affairs of the debtor can be fully investigated and his exact condition be ascertained. It is purposed to make each set of creditors in a given case, or a committee of creditors appointed by them for the purpose, the adjustment committee for the handling of that particular case. While the aid and support of the association will be placed at the disposal of the various trades and all possible assistance rendered them, the actions taken at the meetings will be by creditors themselves. When a failure occurs in any particular line of business all members of the association in that line will naturally and at once come to the association for the use of its rooms for the purpose of holding a conference and selecting a committee to give the case personal attention."

"These creditors' adjustment committees will be empowered to act in the interest of all and it will be their function and duty:

"To investigate the affairs of a debtor reported to be insolvent and adjust the estate when possible, without court proceedings."

"To secure capable and efficient receivers, appraisers, or trustees when court proceedings are found to be necessary."

"To secure a quick adjustment of all honest failures at a minimum cost and with a maximum dividend to the creditors."

"To facilitate and economically secure extensions or liquidations when, upon investigation, it is found to be to the best interests of all."

"To influence concerted action by the creditors for the benefit of all."

"To assist creditors to acquire for their own use the estate of a failing or insolvent debtor when mutually agreed upon."

"It would seem no argument is necessary to convince any one who will seriously consider the matter that through the facilities offered by our association the very best results can be secured. The critical time in the life of a credit is when the debtor becomes embarrassed or insolvent, and it is at that particular time that the prestige and influence of the association may be made available to the creditors. Honest but unfortunate debtors may often be successfully carried through trouble, and under the advice and mutual co-operation of their creditors be placed in a position to continue and conduct a profitable business."

"Who is more directly and deeply interested in an embarrassed or insolvent estate than the creditors themselves, and who are more naturally qualified to conserve the estate than those whose salvage therein is determined by the fairness and skill with which it is administered?"

"In the further progress toward developing this plan to its highest efficiency and perfection we solicit the co-operation of all our members. Its success, in the final analysis, rests upon the members themselves. Fully appreciative of the difficulties to be overcome, but with an abiding faith that it can be accomplished, your officers ask your loyal support and in turn pledge their zealous aid and assistance."