

Increasing Food Prices

Mr. Caouette:—and prevent all salary increases. Let's freeze all wages including those of hon. members.

Mr. Speaker, we have known price controls during the war when the government had frozen wages, retail prices, and so on. We even gave out ration coupons at the same time we set up price controls. With ration coupons you could get butter, coffee, jam, tires, cars, clothes and what have you. According to the value of the coupons you could get the commodities at prices set by the government, through the price board.

• (2050)

But, Mr. Speaker, while you could not get more than what your coupon allowed, at a controlled retail price, you could obtain anything on the black market, either sugar, coffee, or any other good item which was subject to restrictions. You could not get more goods than the number of coupons you had. Although sugar sold then for 8 cents a pound, you were able to get as much as you wanted at 20 cents a pound on the black market.

The same rule applied as regards cars and tires, as well as every item that was government-controlled. Should we go back to this price and trade control in peacetime? This would cause the black market to reappear, and the situation would be a hundred times worse than it is at the present time. An evil cannot be cured with a remedy which is worse than the evil itself.

Then, what do we say? It is quite easy to blame the giants, the supermarkets, as I said earlier. These supermarkets have increased their prices, just like in any other economic or business area. The hon. member for Lanark-Renfrew-Carleton (Mr. McBride) was saying earlier that in 1961, an average Canadian spent 41 per cent of his income on food, while in 1971, he spent only 18 per cent for the same purpose. By the way, the hon. Minister of Agriculture has just stated that perhaps it was only 17 per cent.

Mr. Speaker, I do not believe at all in these statistics. If average Canadians really spend only 17 or 18 per cent of their income on food, this means that they only eat sausages or hamburgers all year long, because no one could, at the present time, buy enough food with 17 or 18 per cent of one's income.

Take the typical case of a citizen who earns \$60 a week for instance and who has two or three children at home. In cities like Montreal and Quebec we still find people who earn starvation wages of \$60 a week. But 18 per cent of \$60 is \$10.80 exactly. What five-member family can live on \$10.80 a week? We should not mock people in their faces, and I think this is what the hon. Minister of Agriculture did—

Mr. L'Heureux: We take the average.

Mr. Caouette: You take the average, yes, but some people must spend 50 per cent of their salary on food. You talk about the average, but some other people spend only 8 or 10 per cent of their income on food. These people cannot even buy the cloth around the bologna. These are facts. So, what are we going to propose?

It is all very well to submit notices of motions, with no solution. Let us carry out an inquiry, they say. I have no

[Mr. Benjamin.]

objection to inquiries, but not to control prices, salaries, even incomes of farmers, retailers, wholesalers, of all citizens in short.

What we suggest is payment of a compensated discount on retail prices which would increase the purchasing power of the consumer without taking anything away from him or increasing prices.

For instance, the federal government should pay a general discount on retail prices of food, clothing and all other products.

Let us take food for an example, since that is what is being discussed, and suppose a payment of 30 per cent discount. A family spending \$30 a week for food, with a 30 per cent discount would save \$9, therefore paying only \$21, and the federal government would pay \$9 to the retailer, representing compensated discount on the retail price. At that time, Mr. speaker, it would work out much cheaper for the Canadian government to grant such a compensated discount than to set up sundry commissions throughout the country and to appoint other agencies for the marketing of products.

It would then cost much less for the federal government, and consumers would pay less than what they are now paying.

I repeat that the average Canadian family only spends 18 per cent of its income on food. The man who earns \$100 a week, for instance,—a minimum salary the establishment of which the three labour leaders of the province of Quebec are calling for—and who must feed five persons, will spend \$18. With \$18 a week, to pay for milk, bread, in short, for all the food needed by a family of five, it is impossible for any hon. member or anybody else to eat decently.

The Minister of Agriculture knows it as the hon. member for Lanark-Renfrew-Carleton who quoted statistics a while ago. Statistics are more or less valid. They seldom are correctly interpreted.

Mr. Speaker, we have already suggested the payment of a discount on retail prices. It was done in wartime for milk. As the retail price of that product was then 14 cents a quart, the federal government granted a discount of 2 cents a quart, so that the consumer only paid 12 cents. The 2 cents were paid to the dairyman.

Once again, Mr. Speaker, I repeat that the Social Credit party's proposal is relevant in any area, whether it be for instance, the clothing industry, the farm implement industry, the primary industry or the distribution industry. What we need is a compensated discount on retail prices which would permit the consumer to buy more and obtain better services. This would certainly encourage the primary producer who would increase his income by selling his goods more easily than at the present time.

This appears to me to be a logical solution; and, since it proved quite useful in time of war, I wonder why it could not also be used in time of peace as well.

I do not know whether the hon. member for Vancouver-Kingsway is willing to propose solutions, if ever a special committee of the House is established to investigate this situation, before June 26, 1972. It may seem somewhat early but, in any case, it is the most adequate solution