

Look at the percentage change over the previous 12 months in the price of food—a 15.8 per cent increase. Housing shows a 5.4 per cent increase, clothing a 5.4 per cent increase, transportation 3.3 per cent, health and personal care 5.5 per cent, rent and recreation 4.6 per cent, tobacco and alcohol—in which some members of the House overindulge—2.7 per cent. If there was ever a testament of ineptitude, it is present in these figures.

I say to you this morning, Mr. Speaker, in the late hours of this debate, that this is not just a testament of failure. It is the last will and testament of the government. On September 4 the people of Canada waited, expecting something better than this testament of ineptitude that came from the Prime Minister. They waited for the government to introduce a comprehensive and direct program to fight inflation. But what did they get? They got a palliative.

They asked the government to implement the contingency plan it had talked about so long, a plan for direct economic controls. But what did they get? Nothing. Yesterday we asked whether a new budget would be introduced to meet these economic problems which have been brought on by the ineptitude of the government, by the fear of the government which has had one eye on the NDP and the other eye on God knows where.

Mr. Poulin: What would you do, Walter?

Mr. Baker: We have asked the government to forecast how rising interest rates will be reflected in the mortgage rate. We have asked what the government is going to guarantee that mortgage money will not go higher. And the government talks about some mystical undertaking with the chartered banks. What it forgets to point out is that the chartered banks are not greatly involved in lending in this country, and that the government, because of its ineptitude, has no control over private lenders and other lenders.

There has been no answer on why prices have been forced up by the government. We have had poultry and meat price increases almost beyond measure. What is the cost of buying a home as a result of government ineptitude? What is the level of rents paid by people in the constituency of the hon. member for Ottawa-Carleton?

Mr. Poulin: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker, I am not from Ottawa-Carleton.

Mr. Baker: They are sober and upright people in Ottawa-Carleton, but a little foolish politically. What about the increased costs of fuel and transportation borne by the people who are behind the statistics? They are the people who matter, but they are the people the government has forgotten.

Earlier in this debate I heard the hon. member for Verdun (Mr. Mackasey) admit he was a city member and knew nothing at all about agriculture, but he spoke about farmers at last getting a decent income. What he forgot, in terms of gross income, was the more expensive input costs of production the likes of which farmers never say before.

Mr. Poulin: And what would you do, Walter?

Mr. Baker: As a result of this, farmers are faced with startling increases in costs. If the hon. member for Ottawa

Cost of Living

Centre is capable of reading a newspaper, I ask him to look at the weekly newspapers and note the auction sales. Thousands of farms are going out of production because of the restrictive policies of the government.

The fact is that the government failed farmers. It has failed Canadians. It has failed to contain the high input costs of farming. Where the people of this country asked for action, they got indecisiveness. Where they asked for competence, they got incompetence. Where they asked for openness, they got deceit. And where they asked for honesty, they got the hon. member for Ottawa Centre.

Mr. Poulin: What would you do, Walter?

● (0200)

Mr. Baker: If the hon. member for Ottawa Centre is in possession of his senses—which I doubt very much—I would ask him to read the speech made by the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Stanfield) on September 4, 1973. I do not know what his condition is, but it is not normal.

An hon. Member: Oh, yes, it is normal.

Mr. Baker: Then I think perhaps he ought to enter this debate tonight, instead of skulking in the back benches of the chamber where he is wont to be.

Mr. Speaker, there is a challenge to be made by all Canadians. I challenge that hon. member to stand tonight and to make a speech. I challenge him to defend the cost of living. I challenge him to defend the increased cost of rents. I challenge him to defend the rising cost of hydro. I challenge him to defend the cost of fuel. I challenge him to stand on his feet and do the job he was elected to do, rather than sit and shout insults from the back of the chamber. If he can stand, I say he dare not stand. If he defends this government in its ineptitude, then he himself is inept.

Some time ago in this House we debated increases for pensioners of the public service, increases in youth allowances and increases in old age pensions. They were heralded by the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Lalonde) as the great cure-all. We voted for those things as a temporary relief, Mr. Speaker. But let the hon. member for Ottawa Centre, all the other callous members on the treasury benches and the claque behind them, understand that they are not relief and, except in the temporary sense, they are not solutions to the problems which face this country.

The solution to the problem lies in the program announced by the Leader of the Opposition, a program he has put before this country since February, 1973. It is a program which this government for its own reasons, good or bad, has sought to ignore, thus leading us to the present situation of crisis.

I challenge that hon. member to get up and defend the economic tomfoolery that we have seen. I challenge him to dispute the eloquent testimony, the righteous and proper economic thought that was brought forth by the hon. member for Don Valley (Mr. Gillies). I should like to hear the hon. member speak on the question of economics. All he has done tonight is shout, and I should like to see him get up and defend the speech made today by the Minister of Finance; that is, if he was present to hear it.