

I think in the light of the special pertinence and the overriding importance of this whole question to consumer cost of living in Canada, it is essential that this matter be debated and drawn to the attention of the government. I think we should find out what proposals and actions the federal government intends to take in this important matter. It may be that the federal government does not at the present time have the power to regulate prices when abuses are found, and I am not certain whether it is absolutely necessary or desirable that the government possess this power.

The hon. member for Burnaby-Coquitlam (Mr. Douglas), the leader of our party, suggested that the government should set up a prices review board. In outlining its functions he stated that it would look into increased prices regarding any commodity, with power to examine the books, profit and loss statements, cost accounting material and other things of material interest, to find out whether or not increased wage costs, costs of raw materials and overhead warranted such an increase being imposed. We have listened for a number of days to comments as to why this cannot be done. Newfoundland, the newest province of Canada, has been able to do this, and this is one of our supposedly underdeveloped areas. The authorities in that province have felt that this is a worth-while and far-sighted step. They are not saying that this cannot be done or that the government does not have jurisdiction.

I should like to quote the suggested terms of reference of that board as reported in the *Financial Post* of March 19, as follows:

The commission will have a free hand to conduct a thorough and independent investigation of prices and profits at both wholesale and retail levels, and all factors and elements entering into prices, including freight rates, trucking, labour rates, overhead, profit received both wholesale and retail.

We have heard in this house almost every day during this session about the need for federal leadership, yet time and time again it has been the provinces that have acted and the federal government which has said there is nothing that can be done about a situation. If we are going to have leadership in this country the federal government must admit that the provinces are ready and that the federal government is willing.

The kind of answers we have received from the government regarding this whole matter of the rising cost of living are completely unsatisfactory. Why is the government

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afraid to establish a prices review board such as we have suggested? Does it feel that knowledge of our economy is too heady a wine for themselves and for the people of this country? The premier of the province of Newfoundland does not think so, and neither do the people of that province. The federal government often seems to be pursuing a policy of keeping information from the province. Even in the small way of ensuring that manufacturers indicate the contents of their products, this government has been reluctant to act.

• (10:20 p.m.)

I do not think the government can put forward the excuse that they do not possess the power to act in this situation. We are not even asking for the power of enforcement. We ask for the power of publicity. It is interesting to note that this whole probe in Newfoundland came about because a housewife got mad and decided to picket a supermarket. I say to the government of Canada, "You don't need any regulations. All you need to do is give the housewives of this country the information and they will take care of the rest."

I think it is important that the housewives know who is to blame and whose fault it is that the cost of living is going up. I have all the faith in the world that the Canadian housewife, militant in the defence of her home and family, will watch, read the publicity, do something about the situation and save the government a great deal of trouble. It is a very small thing that we ask.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rinfret):** Order. I regret to interrupt the hon. member, but the time allotted for his speech has now expired.

**Mrs. Margaret Rideout (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of National Health and Welfare):** Mr. Speaker, I listened with a great deal of interest to the hon. member for Waterloo South (Mr. Saltsman), not only because I am now speaking as parliamentary secretary to the Minister of National Health and Welfare but because I, too, am a housewife.

The hon. member's question related to a report in this week's *Financial Post* to the effect that a royal commission has been appointed by the government of Newfoundland to investigate food and drug prices in that province. In relation to that question I should