

*Cost of Living*

ing that rents have skyrocketed to an astronomical extent. I know of nothing that causes more heartaches in my riding than evictions and the unbearable burden of soaring rents, even in some cases causing the break-up of homes.

I had a particularly vivid experience of this in my constituency last Friday when I was visited by a constituent who was living with her husband, an old age pensioner, in rented but modest premises. Also living with them was a daughter who was a high school student. They have lived in the same premises for ten years, paying a rental of \$130 a month. They provided the furnishings and looked after the repairs. At the end of last month the tenant received a notice that the property had been sold and that she and her husband and daughter must vacate the premises by September 30. A day later she received a lawyer's letter saying that she could disregard this notice of eviction if she and her husband were ready to pay a rental of \$300 a month, an increase of \$170 a month, or more than double.

As the husband's total income, including old age pension and a pension from his previous employment, amounted to \$380 a month, it is quite obvious that they could not afford to pay such a rental. They are desperately trying to get on an already overcrowded list of those seeking to rent premises from the Ontario Housing Corporation.

May I pause to pay tribute to the Ontario Housing Corporation. It may not be perfect, but every week people ask me to assist in getting housing from the Ontario Housing Corporation that is geared to their income. The corporation is financed largely by federal funds. If it had not been for that public housing, many tragedies would have occurred.

No attempt was made by the new owner—indeed, there is no obligation on his part at all—to explain why in one fell swoop he was raising the rent by more than double, and there was no discussion with the tenant as to what he could pay. No figures were offered to justify the increase; there was just the cold, hard legal language of the eviction notice. This sort of situation, though not always so extreme, has been duplicated to my knowledge all over Canada. The amount of increased rent demanded would certainly pay for a very substantial amount of foodstuffs.

What, Mr. Speaker, is the solution? Obviously, one part of the solution is the construction of more public housing and low-rental housing so that supply can balance demand. In the present emergency another method is also required. I submit the time has arrived for rental review and rental controls. The solution is part of what this party has consistently stated, and that is the need for selective controls.

The essentials of life should be controlled, and surely shelter is one of the main essentials of life. It is necessary that we establish, now, some form of rent review or control whereby those who wish to increase rent must justify it by showing that they have increased costs or interest to pay. It is no longer tolerable that rentals can be set unilaterally at the whim of the owner with unlimited power to gouge out what the traffic will bear, which is the situation at the present time.

[Mr. Brewin.]

It was, of course, found possible during the last world war to establish rent controls. The hon. member for Nanaimo-Cowichan-The Islands (Mr. Douglas) reminded me the other day that after the war, when he was premier of Saskatchewan, rental controls were continued for five to six years following relaxation of the wartime regulations. And rental control worked well. As I say, rent control has its problems but they are not insuperable.

I am, of course, aware that there may be constitutional difficulties in respect of rent control which would normally be a matter for provincial legislation. But if there is doubt as to the federal power to impose rent controls at the present time—I must say that I think in light of the present emergency such doubts could be dispelled—the provincial governments, at the recent conference of premiers, made it clear that all of them were willing to co-operate with the federal government in dealing with the problem of controlling inflation.

Therefore, I would strongly urge upon the federal government that in their battle against inflation they deal with this question of rentals by calling a federal-provincial conference on an urgent basis in the very near future to work out a plan for rent controls which would be nationwide in scope. If the provinces agreed, well and good; if they did not agree, the federal government must consider whether it must take the lead in this field.

If measures to halt soaring rentals were taken under the leadership of the government, the people of Canada might be persuaded that the government was serious in its battle against inflation. I believe they would secure public support. In my own city of Toronto, the Toronto Labour Council has urged upon metro council that they ask for provincial legislation permitting rent controls. But this is not the problem of Toronto or of Ontario; it is a national problem and should be dealt with on a national scale.

There are two other aspects of the battle against inflation that I want to raise. The first is that it seems to be absolutely essential that if prices are to be controlled, the government must take the power to enforce the findings of the Prices Review Board. At present the Prices Review Board is patterned on the theory embodied in the Combines Investigation Act, which is that in normal times publicity is an effective method of preventing the fixing of prices by monopolies and the gouging of the consumer. But even in normal times the Combines Investigation Act has proved a very inadequate weapon. Lengthy prosecutions have taken place, fines have been levied and then firms combining together to maintain high prices work out a new, legal, law-proof method of price fixing of their own. However, these are not normal times, and if the government does not recognize the emergency in regard to rentals I suspect they will not be the government for very much longer.

If the Prices Review Board is to be more than mere window-dressing, it must have the power at least to make recommendations for freezing and rolling back prices where it finds there is a threat of unjustified price increases or the fact of unjustified price increases. I think the time has been reached when common sense judgments can be applied.

While it may not be easy in theory to define an unjustifiable price increase or to define what is gouging the