

Cost of Living

business. I assume it is the wish of hon. members that we proceed with the business which is now before us. Is this agreed?

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

Mr. Speaker: It is so ordered.

Mr. Lewis: Mr. Speaker, what we have said from the start regarding the problem of increasing prices that faces Canadians is that there is a way in which these Canadians can be helped. I think it is thoroughly dishonest for anyone in the House or in Canada—and I hasten to say that no spokesman for the Conservative Party has suggested it, so I am not directing it against them—to suggest that this parliament or Canadians in general could in any way completely stop the pressure on prices in this country. It is just impossible, and it is not honest to suggest it, Mr. Speaker.

● (1700)

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Lewis: We believe it is possible to impose roll-backs and controls in areas which are of direct assistance to the people of this country, and it is possible to assist those who are worst hit by the effects of rising prices. It is possible for parliament to do those two things, and they would have an immediate effect for the betterment and the welfare of the people of Canada.

I remind hon. members of this House that almost 60 per cent of the consumer price index is governed by food and shelter prices. The food weight, if I remember correctly—if I am out, it will not be by more than a percentage point or so—in the consumer price index is about 27 per cent and the shelter weight is about 32 per cent. Together those two, food and shelter, represent 59 per cent of the total burden of the consumer price index. But if you took that consumer price index and, instead of applying it on the average, or in the over-all as the present CPI necessarily does, you applied it to certain sections of the community, to the lower and middle-income people, then I suspect food and shelter would represent not only 59 per cent of the cost basket of the consumer but probably closer to 70 per cent and in some cases 80 per cent.

It therefore stands to reason that if we apply will and intelligence to this problem, and if we are able to reduce the effect of the rising prices of food in one area and the effect of rising prices of shelter in the other area, we will immediately beneficially affect the welfare of the largest proportion of the Canadian people, of the Canadian consumers. But in order to do that you must have an agency with power, and the Prime Minister's statement is disappointing beyond description in that it still leaves the Food Prices Review Board, (a) limited to food and (b) without any power itself or without any power in the government to do anything about unjustified price increases.

I do not know what in heaven's name is holding back the government except its traditional failure to meet the situation with courage and with will. I simply do not understand. There is not even a constitutional argument. There is no constitutional obstacle that the government has to overcome, Mr. Speaker, since early in August fol-

[Mr. Speaker.]

lowing the meeting of the provincial premiers in Charlottetown, P.E.I., the premiers came out of that meeting and unanimously announced that they were prepared to co-operate with the federal government in any action it may take to deal with the rising cost of living.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Lewis: That places in the hands of the federal government an undertaking by the provincial jurisdictions which enables the federal government to overcome any jurisdictional obstacle that one might have thought was there. It can do it by delegation of powers, by enabling legislation or by concurrent legislation. There are a whole number of avenues through which Ottawa and the provincial capitals could act jointly and simultaneously to give power either to the Food Prices Review Board or to the government on the recommendation of that board to roll back unjustified price increases. The failure to give us that undertaking in this statement is a great disappointment to everyone who thinks seriously about the problem at this time.

Of course, Mr. Speaker, we are delighted about the increase in family and youth allowances to \$12 effective October 1, instead of having to wait for the increase until January 1 next year. That is of great value to most families. To the average Canadian family with children it means an increase of between \$15 and \$10 a month over what is received now in family and youth allowances. While it is not a large amount of money, it is certainly of very great assistance to Canadian families. I think anyone who does not recognize the value of that as being a partial answer to the rising cost of living is merely being political instead of being objective.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Lewis: I welcome, of course, the increase in the subsidies on domestically consumed wheat, although I am always astounded by the little bit that the government is ready to give to help the ordinary Canadian, compared with the large chunks it is ready to give to the large corporations. The total expenditure, under the present plan, of \$1 a bushel represents \$60 million or \$65 million. From my statistical knowledge, I understand that about 65 million bushels of wheat are consumed in this country. As I say, that means a total cost of \$60 million or \$65 million, and an additional 25 cents a bushel subsidy means an additional \$15 million to assist the Canadian family buying bread and pasta.

I think it is shameful that the government should limit itself in that way. The Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) said that this would avoid an increase of five cents on a loaf of bread that was bound to come in October. But, Mr. Speaker, this evening's Ottawa paper tells us that this morning an immediate increase of six cents per loaf of bread was announced. I say the government should have had the courage to make the subsidy for wheat another 25 cents or so in order to roll back the six cents immediate increase in the price of bread, instead of leaving it at its present high level of cost.

I also, of course, welcome the five cents a quart subsidy for fluid milk, and the similar amount for powdered milk. I merely note in this case that the Prime Minister found it