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High Cost of Living

If the recent delegation of mayors to the Federal Government was of any real value it lay in the publicity that was given to the strongly expressed sentiment that there is a suspicion abroad that the increased cost of foodstuffs in Canada is due largely to combines of dealers who have deliberately manipulated the markets, through the agency, innocently or otherwise, of the cold storage companies. Coal rings were also spoken of with a vehemence that left no doubt in the minds of the governmental committee as to the strength of the statements. Whether or not the government will take steps to ascertain the facts remains to be seen. The Minister of Justice hinted that if any evidence was brought forward sufficient to warrant him he would prosecute any organizers of combines that affected the food of the people. If it is left to private citizens to make the charges, and consequently to bear the expense, it would not be very conducive to action, but we understand that the government will shortly delegate to municipalities, under the War Measures Act, power to take drastic measures to break such combines.

The Minister of Labour stated that the cost of living in Canada had increased but 17 per cent, which was less than any of the belligerent countries and with the exception of the United States, which is 12 per cent, even a smaller increase than any of the neutral countries. The percentage was based on

figures taken from 68 centres in Canada. While we assume the figures to be correct on the whole we do say that they were somewhat misleading for the discussion. For instance, the other day we received a letter from a certain district in New Brunswick giving the prices of certain foodstuffs and in ascertaining the prices in Montreal and Toronto we found there was a difference approximately of 60 per cent., which to say the least is strong circumstantial evidence of food trusts somewhere. A further statement by the minister was that though measures had been taken in other parts of the Empire to regulate the prices of food very little relief had been obtained. We would suggest again that that was hardly the point raised by the delegation though we are frank to say that we wish it had been. The main question as we understood it was the suspicion of food trusts which had caused the prices to be raised in certain industrial centres by 40-50 and up to 60 per cent. If there are no food trusts and no artificial raising of prices by manipulators and the advanced prices are caused only by supply and legitimate demand then the citizens of Canada will be satisfied to pay, but they do object to any one seeking undue profits at their expense, and since the Federal Government has the machinery through its agricultural department to find out the real facts of the situation, it is to be hoped that the truth will soon be told to the people. Mr. W. D. Lighthall stated the case in a nutshell when he suggested that when competition is replaced by monopoly regulation becomes necessary. That point has been reached in Canada.