

The Address—Mr. Nesbitt

of living was greatly stimulated by the notorious steel strike settlement in Hamilton, to say nothing of other wage increases which have nothing to do with labour problems.

• (12:50 p.m.)

A matter I referred to in this House yesterday is the rising cost of detergents, one of the most commonly used household articles. The increase is over 50 per cent in a little over five months and there does not seem to be any explanation forthcoming. Only today the distributors of coffee announced that there is to be a 4 cent per pound increase in the price of coffee. I should like to know what, if anything, the government proposes to do about these things.

The burden falls on that large group of Canadians who have the least amount of money and are the least able to take care of themselves. I refer to those on fixed incomes and the primary producers such as the farmers who are not well organized. It is true that inflation is harmful to people employed in industry and shareholders, but it is not nearly as heavy a burden for them as for those who are not organized and able to protect themselves like people in big business and large unions. Pensioners of all kinds suffer more heavily. They are the ones who are made to bear the burden of the government's inflationary policies.

Why should the sick, the blind, the elderly and others be made to bear almost the full burden of the government's folly? I do not know why, but it seems quite unreasonable that this is so, and by no stretch of the imagination can this be regarded as proper or humane.

It is true that the government has attempted to do something. It set up a prices and incomes commission in an attempt to persuade business and labour to follow certain guidelines. This has not been very successful. Just the other day the president of the Canadian Labour Congress, Donald MacDonald said that labour would not have anything to do with voluntary restrictions on wages, and went so far as to suggest that the government should institute price controls but not wage controls. No one can take such a statement very seriously.

A year or so ago the government instituted the Kennedy Round on tariff reductions. These have not been passed on to the consumer except on rare occasions. Again the government has been able to do nothing about increases in prices.

[Mr. Nesbitt.]

The government has tried to stop commercial building in cities over 50,000 population in Ontario, Alberta and British Columbia. It has attempted to do this by withholding the capital cost allowance of 5 per cent. This has had no effect because building costs are steadily going up at a rate of 12 per cent per year, and builders know they are much farther ahead to build anyway in spite of the government withholding this 5 per cent. This is another government plan which has fallen to pieces.

In the last three budgets we have had tax increases. These were proposed to slow down inflation but they have had no effect at all.

These are the four things the government has attempted. We cannot say it has not tried, but everything it has done is either wrong or ineffective. The public demands action in respect of the steady and rapid rise in the cost of living. The public demands action now. If it does nothing else, the government should at least ease the burden of its inflationary policies which falls almost completely on those who are least able to afford the increase. I have in mind the aged, those on pensions and the primary producers. If nothing else, surely the government could do something to shift the burden a little from those who are least able to support it.

Accordingly, I move, seconded by the hon. member for Edmonton West (Mr. Lambert):

That the following be added to the address: "but we regret that the government ignores the fact that the high level of the cost of living at the present time falls with tragic and increasing severity on pensioners and others who can least afford it."

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Carried.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Is the house ready for the question?

Some hon. Members: Question.

Mr. Baldwin: Call it one o'clock. We want to get the government's answer on this.

Mr. Harries: May I call it one o'clock?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. It being one o'clock I do now leave the chair.

At one o'clock the house took recess.