

THE HIGH COST OF LIVING.

A Contrast in Methods and Results.

IN May, 1914, under strong pressure of public opinion the government appointed a commission to inquire into the question of the High Cost of Living, and to report upon it.

In June of 1915 the commission produced two bulky volumes of evidence. The commissioners declared that "the order in council appointing the board does not call for suggestions as to remedies," but ventured the opinion that "the remedial lines which this inquiry indicates are the encouragement of food production, and the removal of every possible economic weight in the distribution of the process."

No action whatever was taken by the government on this report, and the cost of living continued to mount.

When war broke out the government took to itself, through the War Measures Act, power to prevent "any undue increase in the cost of necessities." The words "undue increase" apparently are as difficult of interpretation to the mind of the government, as are the words "Economy".

Absolutely no advantage has been taken by the government here of the power conferred upon it in this respect through the War Measures Act. So far as it is concerned there has been no "undue increase" in the price of necessities, though the cost of living since the war commenced has risen by leaps and bounds.

The New Regulations.

In November of 1916 pressure of public opinion again forced the government to make some pretext at dealing with the High Cost of Living, which by that time had attained to startling stature and corpulence. On the tenth of that month an order-in-council was drafted, and passed, embodying a series of intricate regulations. A commissioner was appointed at a high salary, and a staff employed to assist him in his labors.

During the four months which have intervened since the passing of the order High Cost of Living has attained further abnormal proportions, and is now stalking through the country with its head held higher than ever. No single concrete result can be attributed to the new regulations, or the efforts of the commissioner and his staff.

If proof were required of the utter futility, and the complete insincerity of the government pretence at dealing with this urgent problem the householder can find it in the following figures taken from the Labor Gazette the official publication of the government:

Cost Increased Since Regulation Made.

In July of 1914 just before war broke out the index figure of the department showing wholesale prices stood at 134.6. In November of 1916, when the government passed its new

"control" regulations it stood at 198.4. In February of 1917, when the regulations had been in force four months it stood at 217-3—and was still going up!

In July of 1914 the estimated cost of a weekly budget of food for an average Canadian family was \$7.42. In November, 1916, when the new regulations went into force it was \$9.81. In February of 1917 after four months operation of the regulations it had risen to \$10.46—and was still going up!

In July of 1914 the weekly cost of living for an average Canadian family, including coal, fuel, rent etc., was \$14.16. In November, 1916, when the government framed its new regulations, it was \$16.30. In February, 1917, after four months of their operation, it had increased to \$16.78—and was still going up!

Condemn the Government.

The above figures, which are official, bear upon the face of them the most striking condemnation of the government in its utter failure to do anything at all toward the controlling of the cost of the necessities of life.

Profiteering a Sacred Privilege.

As a matter of fact, while every other belligerent nation, and many neutral nations, have taken drastic action to prevent the undue enhancement of the cost of living, the Canadian government has adopted, and maintained the attitude throughout the war that profiteering is the sacred right of its friends, and that the middleman must not be interfered with.

The government's regulations provide for an intricate series of enquiries in which the jurisdiction of the municipalities, the provincial attorney general, and the federal authorities are hopelessly confused. Penalties are provided where undue enhancement by means of combines, price fixing by wholesalers, hoarding of supplies, or any other method of artificially enhancing prices, is proved. But the method of proving these things is so cumbersome and clumsy that proof is difficult, if not impossible to obtain. In the last analysis responsibility for instituting prosecution rests with the government. When, even in the event of proof being established, it is considered politically inexpedient to prosecute, the government has it in its power to hide the proof, and dispense with the prosecution.

The Cannery Combine Directors.

For instance the Minister of Labor has announced that canning companies have been investigated. In that connection the annual statement of the Dominion Cannery Ltd. (known familiarly as the Cannery Combine) made at Hamilton on March 7th, 1917 is interesting. The statement shows profits for 1916 of \$668,077, as compared with a deficit in 1915 of \$294,439, or a favorable

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