

D 51873

Interests of Community paramount

Where the Community itself is affected by any course of procedure which is unjust or unreasonable, whether it be excessive profits which unduly enhance the cost of living, or unjustifiable strikes or lock-outs which, by lessening production, equally adversely affect the cost of living, and create hardship in other ways, the Community has not only a right, but a supreme duty, to see that its interests are fully protected. Without the part which the Community plays in the production and distribution of wealth, neither production nor distribution, on a scale worthy of the name, could be carried on for a single day. What could Capital, or Management, or Labour, win for themselves in the way of remuneration or reward but for what the Community makes possible through the nation's defences, through its maintenance of law and order, through facilities of transportation and communication made possible at the instance of the State, to say nothing of much else in the way of organized Community service to which we have grown so accustomed, that its source has almost ceased to be recognized. In my opinion, of all the parties to Industry—Capital, Management, Labour and the Community—the Community is the most important. The interests of the Community should be supreme. If this be so, means must be found to assert the rights of the Community, and to have those rights respected.

The need for Information

But how, you ask, is so vast an entity as the Community able to exert an influence sufficient to protect its paramount interest? There are a number of ways by which this can be effected to a greater or lesser extent. These, however, I have not time to speak of tonight. I shall mention but one, but this, to my mind, is the most likely to be of greatest service in coping with the present situation which is one that is nation-wide.

So far as Canada is concerned, we are justified in looking, first and foremost, to the Parliament of Canada. Parliament represents the people as a whole. It exists not for the purpose of furthering or protecting any special interest at the expense of other interests, but to further and protect the general interest. Every member of Parliament has that obligation with respect to his own constituency. He has it also in relation to the whole of Canada.

You will probably suppose that I am now about to say that what we need is more in the way of legislation. In my opinion, it is not more in the way of legislation that is required, but more in the way of information. So far as the evils of unjust and unreasonable prices are concerned, we have, I believe, under existing legislation, very nearly all, if not all, the powers that are necessary to meet any situation that can be demonstrated to be unfair and unjust. The handicap under which Parliament acts in dealing with this problem today is in its limited knowledge of the facts. Accusations are made first against one interest or group in the community, then against another. Those attacked immediately reply that

D 51874

they are being accused unjustly. It may be that the accusation relates to excessive profits. It may be that it relates to hoarding. It may be that it relates to unwarranted restrictions, or it may be to one or many more other causes. In relation to much of what is being alleged, what is not known are the facts. In practically all this class of cases, once the facts are known, I believe means can speedily be found to remedy the situation if it be capable at all of remedy. I believe the facts themselves will point the way to what further action may be necessary to protect the Community in its rights.

Investigation by Special Committee of House of Commons

What then obviously, is needed is the most effective means to disclose the facts. I do not believe that the people of Canada expect the government to deny reasonable prices to the farmers or reasonable returns to other producers, or fair and just return for necessary services to distributing or other agencies. But people do want to be satisfied that advantage is not being taken, by anyone, of conditions of scarcity, in order to exploit the great mass of consumers. There may be individuals or corporations who are taking advantage of an exceptional position or opportunity to charge exorbitant prices. Powers of investigation rigidly, legitimately, and carefully exercised, will, I believe, go far towards remedying such social wrongs.

Believing all this so firmly, I intend, at a suitable time after Parliament reassembles, as a part of the government's programme, and in addition to the government's own measures in other directions, to move that a Special Committee of the House of Commons be appointed to investigate this all-important national problem. The House will be asked to give the Committee the necessary powers to ascertain the facts with regard to the causes that have operated or are operating adversely to affect the cost of living. Provision will be made for inquiry into cases where there are reasonable grounds for believing that increases in prices are due to a course of conduct which is unjust and unreasonable in relation to the production, distribution and exchange of commodities and services essential to human well-being. On this Committee, provision will be made for the representations of members of all political parties. As it is the public interest the investigation is intended to serve, the Committee, subject to reservations the Committee itself may deem it advisable to make, will be expected to hold its hearings in public.

Aim of Committee

I need scarcely say that it would wholly destroy the value of such a Committee were it to be made an instrument for witch-hunting, or a vehicle to embarrass unnecessarily any legitimate business, or any individual. No properly conducted business should have anything to fear. Indeed, any individual or corporation being unjustly accused, will, through the agency of the Committee, be afforded the best possible means of having grounds for suspicion removed. I do not believe that the people of Canada wish to do an