

High Cost of Living

Toronto Board of Trade Inquiry reveals Tariff Protected Combines as chief cause of increased cost of living and report recommends
Parcels Post and Public Markets as Remedy

An exceedingly interesting and valuable report on the high cost of living has just been issued by the Toronto Board of Trade as the result of an inquiry carried on by a sub-committee of that body presided over by Professor M. A. Mackenzie, of Toronto University. While the report has special reference to the city of Toronto, its findings undoubtedly apply equally well to other parts of Canada, and it will be of special interest to the farmers of Western Canada because of the striking support which it gives to the attitude which has been taken by the organized farmers on a number of important questions.

An increase in the production of gold and enormous expenditures on military and naval armaments are given as reasons for the increase in the cost of living throughout the world, but it is shown by tables compiled from official statistics, that while English prices have increased by 9 per cent. since 1900, prices in the United States have increased by 17 per cent. and in Canada by 18 per cent. "Canadian food prices," the report states, "are now on a higher level than English prices. . . . The retail price of bread in London is 2½c per lb., as against 3 1-3c in Toronto, while milk is 8c a quart, as against 9½c here."

After referring to the increase in the production of gold and the enormous sums being expended on preparations for war, the report continues:—

"A third cause which has especially affected the increased cost of food is to be found in the migration cityward which has been taking place nearly all over the civilized world. Moreover, the adoption of the principle of protection by the food-exporting countries has greatly increased in such countries this movement citywards and has in North America, for example, developed great manufacturing industries in the cities, largely at the expense of the country districts; even in a fertile province like Ontario land has been actually going out of cultivation during the past few years.

Effect of Food Taxes

"One cause operating in Canada as a whole which permits the prices of food-stuffs to be higher in Canadian cities than in London is the tax levied on imports of food from abroad and paid, of course, by the Canadian consumer. This tax was intended to protect the Canadian farmer in times of Canadian scarcity and to be inoperative in times of Canadian plenty, but the development of the packing and canning industries, coupled with the growth of cold-

storage facilities, has made it possible today for a group of men to entirely control the prices at which our farmers must sell certain products—near all the possible buyers being in the group—and also to maintain the prices at which the consumer must buy the same products up to the level of the foreign price, plus freight, plus duty. We all know how high are the prices of domestic fruit and vegetables, while imported tropical fruits, upon which there is no duty, are said to be as cheap in Toronto as in any other city outside the tropics. It was never intended that a tax imposed to protect the farmers should be used by dealers to corner domestic produce. If Argentine beef, New Zealand mutton and Australian butter, for example, had free access to Canada, no one could doubt that the prices of these commodities would at once drop to about the London level, and it is pretty certain that the Canadian producer would, on the average, get at least as much as he is getting now.

"That this tax on the importation of food has resulted in raising the price of food to all who live within the taxed area is now clearly seen by the industrial classes of Germany and of Austria, and is apparently becoming obvious even in the United States. In these countries manufacturers and municipal councils are joining forces with the artisans in demanding the removal of the tax on foodstuffs.

Middlemen's Combine

"The causes which make for higher prices in Toronto as against the smaller places are:—

1.—The apparent disappearance here of any competition in some of the businesses connected with the collection and distribution of food products, which businesses appear to have fallen into the hands of a few powerful allied interests. Milk is a good example. We pay 9½ cents a quart for milk which cannot compare in quality with the 6-cent milk of the small town a few miles away. Your committee have been informed that the association of Toronto commission merchants engaged in the fruit and vegetable business have secured exclusive control of the only Toronto market for the wholesale trade, and thus, by eliminating competition, are in a position where they can dictate terms to both producer and consumer. Men engaged in raising fruit and vegetables for city consumption report that they have found the conditions here so intolerable as to force them either to seek for other markets or to go out of the business. It is not probable that any relief can be obtained by municipal or governmental interference. The history of nearly all attempts at such interference with existing commercial conditions is not a hopeful record. The privileged corporations can afford to and do employ the best brains available, and are usually better served, even by their legal advisers, than is the municipality or government which attempts to coerce them. As a rule, our economic troubles arise not from the want of but from an excess of official regulations.

Co-operation the Remedy

"A better remedy would appear to lie in the hands of the growers of fruit and vegetables themselves, who appear to have completely lost control of the selling end of their own business. Ireland today affords a splendid object lesson in this matter. Ten years ago the small Irish farmers were absolutely at the mercy of the middleman, who kept the prices at which they bought as low as they liked, and maintained the prices to the city dealer as high as they dared. Today these small Irish farmers are learning the trick of combination so as to control the selling end of their own business, with the result that the farmer is getting better prices for his produce and the city dweller is paying less for the same.

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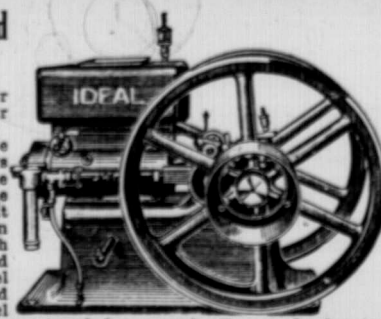
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