

Who Gets the Four Cents?

To the Editors of *The Civilian*:

I read in the Labour Gazette the table showing retail prices of commodities in different places in Canada. Generally speaking, the figures show great differences, and these differences puzzle me not a little. I do not desire to go into the general question of prices, but I wish that some Royal Commission or some other authority would explain to me the difference in just two of the figures that stand one over the other in this table.

These figures show that, during February, 1911, "sirloin steak, best, per lb." was 14c in Hull and 18c in Ottawa — a difference of 4 cents.

Now, as one who sometimes aspires to indulge in "sirloin steak, best," and who pays at least 18c therefor, I would like to know who gets that four cents.

It may be that the printer got it (in his mind) by simply making a mistake in the figure. If that be the explanation, good; I am satisfied.

It may be that the Labour Gazette correspondent got it by quoting the figure wrongly. Or it may be that it was dropped in the river between the Hull correspondent and the Ottawa correspondent through just a little difference of understanding as to what really is "sirloin steak, best." If this be the explanation, I am sorry I have called attention to the matter.

But if this is not merely a typographical or clerical 4 cents, if it is real money, then I would like to know who got it?

Does the Hull butcher buy his "sirloin steak, best," from the Gati-neau farmer, while the Ottawa butcher buys his from the meat trust at a higher price? Is that 4 cents now in the vaults of Mr. Armour or Mr. Cudahy? If so, I think we ought to take steps for its extradition, with a view to returning it to the man who owns it.

Did that 4 cents go to the Ottawa real estate owner for higher rent? In that case, what did the real estate owner do to deserve it?

I suppose the Hull butcher also must occupy real estate and pay rent. What special virtue is there in an Ottawa real estate owner that he should have the power to take four big cents—and mighty big every one of them looks in these days—from a fellow-citizen every time that fellow-citizen wants a pound of "sirloin steak, best."

I shall be told that, if the citizen doesn't wish to pay four cents extra to the Ottawa butcher to be handed over to the Ottawa real estate man, he may go to Hull — (I wish to be careful to say that exactly right) — and get his "sirloin steak, best," there. This may be very true. But there are lots of things that are true and don't cost a man four big cents. What's the matter with Ottawa? We are a bigger town than Hull and we take all kinds of pride in ourselves. Why should a man have to go from Ottawa to Hull every time he wants a pound of "sirloin steak, best," under penalty of being fined four cents?

Does the four cents go to the clerk who serves me, the driver who brings the meat to me, the gentlemen who make the paper in which it is wrapped, the string with which it is tied, the marble slab on which it rests, the plate-glass window through which I see it displayed marked down to eighteen cents, and all the other people who take part in handing it to me, in a fashion that keeps me from turning vegetarian? If so, I feel very much obliged to all these gentlemen. At the same time, I look lingeringly at the four big cents. Is all that worth all this? Couldn't we get these things for less than four big cents? Couldn't it be shaded to three cents, or two and a half, or