

Proceedings on Adjournment Motion

country. Items which have gone up in price are protein foods such as meat, fish, chicken, which are essential proteins for body building. It is the fresh fruits and fresh vegetables which the Canada food rules list among the most important essentials for good diet in this country which have gone up in price.

Other foods which have gone up in price are butter and shortening. These are foods essential, as every mother knows, for building healthy bodies and strong nerves in their children and in other members of their families.

• (10:10 p.m.)

Each one of these food essentials is a "must" for children and adults alike. Yet already these things are beyond the range of low income families. I have had letters from women across this country in various provinces pointing out in despair that the price of milk has gone up to such an extent they can no longer afford to buy it in reasonable quantities. Bread prices have gone up. The price of oranges and the fresh fruits has risen until these things are completely out of the range of that quarter of our population which is living at the poverty level at the present time.

Yet the government is showing no disposition to do anything about this situation. Its only answer so far would seem to be an agreement to wait for a report of the Economic Council, a report which will not be available before the end of this year. This question of the steady, stealthy rise in the cost of living is becoming one of the foremost problems before this country, but we have been sitting here fighting about everything else under the sun without going anywhere near this issue, though it is vital to the needs of the low income group in this country. Any talk about a war on poverty is meaningless if we allow the cost of living to rise all the time.

What does the government intend to do about rising prices? This is what we want to know. Are hon. gentlemen on the treasury benches opposite going to wait for the Economic Council to report? If so, they are not heeding the warning of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development which issued a special report at the end of January about Canada, telling us we should do well to watch unnecessary price rises in this country and suggesting it might be well for this country to establish guide lines in this regard.

[Mrs. MacInnis (Vancouver-Kingsway).]

What we need now is something which the Consumers Association of Canada has been demanding since 1960, a department of consumer affairs which would be able to study this question of rising prices, a department which would be able to bring together organizations such as manufacturers, retailers, producers of household necessities, sales people and others and inquire about price rises and the reasons for them. We need a department to look after the interests of the consumers. It is long overdue.

We find the national president of the Consumers Association of Canada, Mrs. A. F. W. Plumtre, coming out with the following words:

Consumers today face many problems with the spending of their incomes—rising food prices, uncertainty about the cost of borrowing to buy on instalment plans, misleading advertisements and merchandising devices, inadequate labelling of goods, and in general a lack of information as to how to get the best value for their dollars—

We find the Prime Minister (Mr. Pearson) endorsing this consumer week which is now almost at an end. He said:

We in government appreciate and support the work done by the Consumers Association. We support the Association's renewed efforts to bring to the attention of more Canadians the many services and benefits they receive through the Association's efforts, and to increase membership in the Association so that those services and benefits can be broadened.

Then, when an hon. member rises in this house at the very beginning of consumer week and asks what the government intends to do this week, to mark consumer week, in order to check the rising cost of living, we find members of the government sitting there with smiles on their faces, saying no single word in reply.

I ask you, Mr. Speaker: is it not time something was done about one of the really important questions facing this country? Is it not time something was done to check the steady rise in the cost of living which has put the important things of life, the bedrock essentials, beyond the range of a good quarter of our population in a very large measure and which now menaces other sections of the population as well?

Mr. Jean Chrétien (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, it is the policy of the government to ensure that relative stability of costs and prices is maintained in the Canadian economy. Such stability will help sustain the present economic