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Municipal Fair Prices Committee

In last month's issue we urged that the Order in Council dealing with the prices of food stuffs be rescinded in favour of another one giving more power and responsibility to local councils. This has since been done, and it is now right up to the local authorities to seize their opportunity to eliminate the innate suspicion that profiteering in food has been and is being practised on the Canadian people. Under the new Order each Council is asked to appoint a Fair Price Committee, whose first duty will be to investigate retail prices and then publish their findings in the local press. This will at once enable the citizens to know whether or not their local dealers are dealing fairly with them. What is more, the continual publication of what the local Committee considers fair prices will certainly have the effect of checking the would-be profiteer, in food substitutes. But if publicity fails to check the profiteer then the committee has the splendidly effective weapon of summary jurisdiction, which in Australia, has done more than anything else to keep prices of food down to normal profits.

How far the Municipal Councils will take advantage of the new Order remains to be seen. Some of our mayors have already made a protest against what they consider, the onus of an unpleasant responsibility being thrust upon them at the eleventh hour. While we fully agree with these municipal executives, that it is late in the day to ask the councils to take over a duty in which the Federal authorities have signally failed, we do say, as emphatically as we can, that however late, every Municipal Council should take up the responsibility of seeing that the citizens resident within their respective communities are protected against excessive prices.

For those thousands of men and women who are forced to get their meals in restaurants, the Fair Price Committee can do much in reducing the present excessive charges which in a recent enquiry showed profits approximating 1,200 per cent.

The honest dealer will welcome a Fair Price Committee; the dishonest dealer will deserve all that is coming to him in the way of fines and imprisonment.

Owing to war conditions the building of houses, particularly for the working class, has been stopped with the subsequent raising of rents; not in proportion to capital outlay, which in property values has decreased, but because of increased demand. In other words, too many city landlords have taken advantage of war conditions to make excessive profits out of their tenants. Under the new Order-in-Council this worst kind of profiteering can be stopped too—and by the direct representatives of the tenants.

There are municipal men who are under the impression that municipal government in Canada is confined to the collection of taxes, and the building and maintenance of local public works. As a matter of fact, this is but a part of local government—and a small part at that. Every phase of citizenship affecting the community as a whole comes under the purview of the local council as representatives of the people, and we don't know of any phase more important at this time than the matter of the cost of living. Since the war broke out everything has increased in price, much more so than the average family income. This may be taken, and has been taken, as part of the price of war to be paid by those staying at home. But when advantage is taken of necessary increases in the price of foodstuffs to still further advance the cost for the benefit of the few dealers or manufacturers, and which will be to the detriment of the already extra-burdened consumers, a sharp lesson is needed. And now that they have the power, the councils should not hesitate to act when necessary, though we believe that the publication of a fair price list will be quite sufficient to deter the evil-doer. Only the Fair Price Committees cannot be appointed too soon.