

How To Find Out All About Fair and Reasonable Prices

The old-fashioned town meeting, when everybody in the town gathered in the town hall at the sound of a bell and discussed the problem with which the town had trouble, is the foundation of democracy in Canada. Everybody had a chance to express his opinion and out of a full discussion the truth was revealed and a solution obtained.

The town meeting has given way to the Municipal Council, elected annually, and much less elastic than the old order. The spirit of the town meeting is still prevalent in every Municipality and can still exercise considerable influence on the Municipal Council, especially round about election time.

The recent Order-in-Council, fathered by the Department of Labor, authorizing Municipal Councils to appoint Fair Price Committees to investigate the cost of living and to publish fair price schedules is an attempt to crystallize the spirit of the old town meeting, agitating the minds of the consumers within Municipalities and suggest to Municipal Councils the advisability of doing something to reassure consumers that the prices they are paying for foodstuffs are fair and reasonable, all things considered under war conditions.

This Order-in-Council provides a thoroughly democratic method of getting at the problem within Municipalities of the cost of living. The consumer is willing to pay the prices he is asked if he is sure in his own mind that these prices are fair and reasonable and that he is not being made the victim of profiteering. The fact that the prices for foodstuffs are higher to-day than they were in pre-war days makes the consumer think that profiteering plays a large part in enhanced prices. The out-of-doors man, meaning the man in the street, in this regard has nothing to go on except the pressure upon his pocket and instinct.

If a local Committee, familiar with local conditions, investigated the prices of foodstuffs within a Municipality and came to the conclusion that those prices were fair and reasonable, then the out-of-doors man would have a standard on which to base his judgment. He would readily believe that the members of the Fair Price Committee, being disinterested and cognizant of costs and conditions within the Municipality, would make a just report. If this Committee publish a list of fair prices which showed that the prices ruling in the Municipality were neither fair nor reasonable, the consumer would then know that his suspicions of undue profits to somebody were justified. If, on the other hand, the Committee's list of fair prices showed that the prices being charged within the Municipality were fair and reasonable, then the consumer would have to correct his judgment as to the prevalence of profiteering.

The proposal provided for by the Order-in-Council is in the right direction. It can do no harm. It may do good to have local Fair Price Committees appointed and fair price schedules published. Who will be harmed? The demand for such action has come up from the consumer and his consideration should be the first aim on the part of the members of Municipal Councils. If the consumer wants to know whether he is charged fair and reasonable prices within his Municipality, all he has got to do is to insist that his Municipal Council take advantage of the Order-in-Council that authorizes the appointment of a Fair Price Committee.

If his Municipal Council, however, declines to act in the premises, the consumer has reasonable grounds to suppose that the welfare of the consumer is not the first consideration on the part of the Municipal Council. Some Municipal Councils have criticized the Order-in-Council saying that it would do no good. Such a criticism is an expression of opinion and is not in the nature of a judicial utterance. How does any Municipal Council know that the appointment of a Fair Price Committee would do no good, until such a Committee is appointed, its report presented to the Council, and its fair price schedule published in the newspapers? "By their fruits ye shall know them," and in this day and generation an Order-in-Council is tested by its results.

Another criticism offered is that Municipal Fair Price Committees cannot cover the whole ground. No Municipal Council need worry about this for it is an obvious truth. But wherever the range of cost of a food product does

go outside of a Municipality, means are provided in the Order-in-Council that will furnish the Municipal Fair Price Committee with the necessary facts to assist them in their investigation and their judgment.

The fact of the matter appears to be that any Municipal Council that does not take action under the recent Order-in-Council to appoint a Fair Price Committee is afraid of the task that is reasonably its own. It knows that the consumers are exercised about the high cost of living and it also knows that it now has a means of ascertaining whether the disturbance in the public mind is due to unfair and unreasonable prices for foodstuffs, but looking into the water it fears to take the plunge lest it may antagonize some sections of the community in which it places its trust for re-election. The remedy for this state of affairs is in the hands of the consumers and they will be well advised if they do not allow the Municipal Council to camouflage the situation and keep them in doubt as to whether the high cost of living is due to excessive profits on somebody's part or merely to the action of the necessity of war.

When it comes to a real question of local importance absolutely within the purview of the Municipality, Municipal Councils have a strange way of acting like crabs and can only be brought up to the mark by agitation on the part of the consumers who are vitally interested in the cost of food. If the consumers desire action from their Municipal Councils they must agitate and force them to take advantage of the provision of the recent Order-in-Council that authorizes Municipalities to appoint Fair Price Committees, investigate the cost of living, and publish fair price schedules.

MUNICIPAL OWNERSHIP WINS IN CHICAGO.

The Chicago municipal ownership forces of the city in general, have just won a most significant victory. The traction ordinance which the street car interests had framed up and forced through the city council over the mayor's veto, was defeated at the polls on November 5th, by over 30,000 majority.

LIGHTING ON THE BLOOR ST. VIADUCT, TORONTO.

The Bloor St. Viaduct, Toronto, is one of the few civic enterprises finally completed during the period of the war. Its value to Toronto is almost inestimable owing to its strategic position in the city. The Viaduct connects Danforth Avenue on the east side of the Don Valley where there is a large and growing population, with Bloor street one of the main east and west arteries.

Previous to the opening of the Viaduct all traffic from the east and north-east of the city towards the middle, north and north-west had to pass over the Don Valley some miles or so to the south, thus congesting all the down town district.

A few particulars about the Viaduct at this time may be of interest. From Broadview avenue to Sherbourne street the Viaduct is practically one mile long. Its average width is 86 ft., consisting of 64 ft. 6 in. roadway and two 10 ft. sidewalks. The roadway is about 125 ft. above the Valley. The construction of the Viaduct is of reinforced concrete.

There is a double track civic trolley line on the Viaduct with a single line of trolley poles between the tracks. The pole is in three sections of 5 in., 6 in. and 7 in. steel tube and the trolley wires are carried on a double bracket arm ornamented with handsome cast iron braces. Immediately below the braces is a special Winter Joyner cast iron four light bracket containing at present 100 watt Nitrogen lamps and located 14 ft. 6 in. above the surface of the road. There are 36 poles in all spaced 90 ft. apart.

The present lighting is considered as a war time proposition and will undoubtedly be replaced or supplemented at some future time with lighting which will be more in keeping with the magnificent structure. Provision has been made for the possible installation of metal standards on each of the balustrades of the Viaduct and also along the curb of each sidewalk, and undoubtedly in the future some adequate scheme of lighting will be developed which will utilize a good portion of these outlets.