

Emergency Powers Act

has been going up, the price index of what he has to sell has been going down somewhat during the last two years.

But it is the people on small fixed incomes who are the greatest sufferers. First in that class come the old age pensioners. We as members of parliament come in contact with many of these people and we know exactly the conditions in which they live. Any increase they have had in pension, either in the form of the basic pension or in bonuses, has been long ago wiped out and absorbed, and their standard of living is going down in proportion to the extent to which prices have been rising. The same is true of those veterans who are on disability pensions. It is true of superannuated people, including civil servants and the rest.

The urgency of this matter is emphasized by a consideration of the cost of living index. As at January 1 we were told that this had reached the hitherto astounding figure of 172.5; but statistics published within the last few days show that the general index now is 175.2, as has been mentioned here today by the leader of the opposition (Mr. Drew). That represents an increase of 2.7 in a single month. What will it be a month from now is the question we might ask, or a year from now, unless something is done now to check it.

It is fitting that a protest about this matter should be made by a member of this C.C.F. group. For six years we have been pleading with this government, almost daily during the sessions, to do something about it. That is one of the reasons why, as I mentioned before, there is little new to be said about it or little new in the way of argument that we can advance today.

This government has done nothing about it; in fact, the attitude of the government has been negative rather than positive. They have adopted a wait-and-see policy. They talk of mark-up control perhaps, but not price control. To sum it up, one might say that they fiddle while Rome burns. The Minister of Finance (Mr. Abbott) has from time to time tried to lull us into a state of passivity by telling us that the situation will remedy itself. Prices will level off, he said, with the increased production, and he was sure that business and manufacturing people generally would not take undue advantage of the situation in order to raise prices. Well, that hope, like certain other hopes the minister had, proved to be badly founded.

Again the government, by its talking of controls and its refusal to do anything about them, has itself given an impetus to the very rise in prices which they desire to check.

The bill before the house at the present time is one under which price controls can be imposed if the government so desires. The very existence of that bill, which would furnish the machinery for such control, is itself a hint to certain business interests to put up their prices while yet they may. There are two attitudes which I think I can discern on their part: (a) let us make what we can while the opportunity exists; and (b) let us get the prices up to a point at which they will still be profitable, and very profitable, even if they are frozen.

My Liberal friends, who support this government, continue to support it just as loyally in its attitude on price controls as they do for everything else, despite the fact that they must have been showered by resolutions, wires, letters and cards and other expressions of opinion asking for a price control policy, and in spite of the publication of the results of a poll, which in so far as such polls are accurate, show the vast majority of the people in this country in support of some form of price control now.

As to my Liberal friends, the hon. members from Saskatchewan, they will remember that in that province a number of meetings were held months ago to which they were invited to discuss this very question. They saw fit not to attend those particular meetings.

Mr. Ferrie: C.C.F. propaganda.

Mr. Knight: My hon. friend, whose only contribution to this house ever since he has been here is unmannerly interruptions, might make a speech on this question one of these days and give us some of his opinions, rather than maintaining that intelligent silence which does not befit him—or does it?

I was proceeding to say that the Liberal leader in the province of Saskatchewan was induced to attend one of these meetings in my own city, sponsored by the trades and labour council. He could go to that one because it was not sponsored by the C.C.F. There the Saskatchewan Liberal leader opposed price control and defended the inaction of this government in regard to it.

I said that my Liberal friends show a lack of interest in this matter, but that is not altogether a new thing; for I must remind this government of an occasion when the hon. member for Rosetown-Biggan (Mr. Coldwell) moved an amendment in this house asking for the imposition of price controls and the provision of subsidies. My hon. friends explained the unfavourable vote on that motion to their constituents by saying that the matter involved a vote of confidence and would bring about the ultimate catastrophe which in their opinions would be