

*Supply—Consumer and Corporate Affairs*

we all know, Mr. Chairman, 100 represents the level as at 1949.

I suggest that these are ominous figures. The consumer price index has increased by 6.5 per cent during the last 22 months. During approximately the same period unemployment across Canada has risen to about 6.4 per cent of the labour force. Thus the buying power of the people of Canada, especially of the unemployed, is being relentlessly choked. In May, 1966 people were referring to the cost of living, which then stood at the figure of 143.4, as unbearable. The government ignored our pleas and now, 22 months later, the figure is 152.7, an increase of 6.5 per cent in just 22 months. The government has done nothing about the matter. Perhaps I am being unfair. They have done something. They have formed a new department, the Department of Consumer and Corporate Affairs, and installed a most gracious, intelligent and well liked minister to head it. He is running for the leadership of his party, and I wish him well. I say to him today that if he gets the leadership the thing for him to do, and quickly, is to try to reduce the cost of living of the working people of Canada.

● (5:50 p.m.)

**Some hon. Members:** Hear, hear.

**Mr. Alkenbrack:** The minister has spoken of the services and offices which have been started but so far the minister has not brought down the cost of living one single point. In fact, the cost of living has not decreased one-tenth of a point and the statistics quoted prove my point. I say to the minister: Do not let the Prime Minister in his easygoing way convince you that all that is necessary is the installation and setting up of another board or commission. I now wish to quote the Prime Minister's words on the Canadian economy spoken in this chamber. On page 7536 of *Hansard* for March 12, 1968, the Prime Minister is reported to have said:

These selective programs...have their effect over the longer term. But in the current situation additional measures are required to have a more direct and immediate effect. We must find some effective means of influencing, not controlling but influencing, the many individual decisions that give rise to increases in incomes, costs and prices.

Those words are ominous. They point the finger at what the government has done during the past four years. The cabinet has not made one decision to prevent many unreasonable increases of incomes, costs and prices. Evidently the Prime Minister must have

[Mr. Alkenbrack.]

learned his lesson because from his words he seems to want to rectify the actions of the past four years.

As recorded in *Hansard* at page 7537 the Prime Minister went on to say:

To this end the government proposes to establish a governmental agency, commission or board, whatever it may be called, to review and scrutinize major decisions affecting prices, incomes and costs throughout the economy.

He spoke of what this agency would do and then said:

The precise nature and the terms of reference of this review agency will be determined after necessary consultations with interested parties. These include provincial governments, the leading elements in the labour movement and in industry, professional associations and others concerned. We shall also, Mr. Speaker, take carefully into account any views on this proposal expressed in parliament.

The Prime Minister's words are nothing but a gesture. They are a sort of economic wind-dressing, enough to get him safely past his resignation date. I say to the minister, who may win the leadership, do something now about the vicious price spiral. Do something people can give you credit for. Make our price laws and regulations effective.

The Wartime Prices and Trade Board had a difficult job to do. I remember that in 1942, when I was in the lumber business, one of my trucks loaded with lumber destined for a wartime airdrome, Camp Mohawk at Deseronto, stalled on the road 20 miles north of Napanee with two blown tires. I had to apply to the board at their Kingston office for permission to buy two tires and they sent four men in a car 45 miles from Kingston to make certain that the truck needed two new tires. You could call that another ridiculous incident in the workings of bureaucracy, but they let me have the tires. That board was doing its job and it helped to win the war. The board was set up as an emergency measure.

Now, 26 years later, I submit that Canada will never survive economically unless some regulatory authority controls price levels within a free economy. The government ought to set an example first by controlling its own spending better. In his statement the other day the Prime Minister said, as recorded on page 7537 of *Hansard*:

We shall also, Mr. Speaker, take carefully into account any views on this proposal expressed in parliament.

I hope the minister will heed the constructive words of all those who have taken part in this debate. I say that the response of this government to the warnings that were given