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High Cost of Foodstuffs in Canada

Like the rest of the Empire Canada already has the problem of the high cost of foodstuffs on her hands but with this difference that whereas the other Dominions have taken effective steps to check the unscrupulous raising of prices by food speculators, this country as yet has done nothing, and so the only limits, to the grasping selfishness of our food perveyors are our patience, which is long suffering, and the size of our purses. In Newfoundland the Governor in Council was authorized in September, 1914—immediately after the war started—to take possession of all foodstuffs unreasonably held; that is, any foodstuffs held for higher prices than the maximum rates laid down by the authorities are seized, and but a reasonable price allowed to the sellers. In Australia they have gone further. In every state of the Commonwealth legislation has been enacted under different titles. For instance, in Victoria they have the Price of Goods Act which provides for the fixing of maximum prices by a Prices Board acting in conjunction with the Governor. Any person selling above the maximum rates is liable to a fine of \$2,500. Western Australia has a Royal Commission to fix the maximum prices and if any person, who has them in his possession, refuses to sell goods at the maximum rates, he is liable to a fine of \$5,000. What is more these fines are rigidly enforced. In New South Wales the foods protection measure is under the title of the "Necessary Commodities Control Act." In addition, Federal legislation has been brought about giving power to both the Commonwealth and State Governments to secure all information in regard to the available amount of food stuffs within the borders of Australia, the amount required to supply the people, and of all attempts at speculative dealing. There is not much

chance in the land of the midnight sun for the man contemptible enough to gamble, with loaded dice, with the food of the people. In New Zealand, under the Trade and Commerce Act, similar powers to those of Victoria are vested in the government—the fine is \$2,500—and in all the crown colonies, notably in the West Indies and Egypt very strong measures have been taken to protect the inhabitants from the food sharps.

Now the question comes, what are we going to do in Canada to keep the prices of our food down to reasonable figures. Most of our foodstuffs supply is grown within our own borders, and while it is reasonable to expect some increase in prices because of the demand of our armies, Great Britain and our allies, the prices now pertaining in most parts of the Dominion are not only excessive now but are in great danger of soaring skywards. This is a serious situation and one that should have been taken in hand by the authorities immediately war broke out, but better late than never. To our mind the remedy lies equally in the jurisdiction of the Federal and Provincial parliaments. That is, simultaneous legislation should be enacted in each of the provinces enabling local authorities to appoint a Prices Board to fix maximum prices and with power to enforce the act by heavy fines for delinquents, and that a Federal commission be appointed with similar powers to those of the governments of Australasia. Such a commission working with the local Prices Boards would soon stamp out the cornering and manipulation of food stuffs of which the present high prices are the consequence. Be that as it may something must be done, and done quickly, if the prices of our food are to be within the purchasing power of the average family.