

almost impossible to make ends meet and to put on the table food sufficient for the needs of themselves and their families.

Many Canadians who were industrious and thrifty in their working years and made some preparation for their retirement years now find that what they thought was some security is only enough to keep them from benefiting from the various programs now instituted to care for those who were unable, for various reasons, to make any provision for the future. The understandable soliloquy of some of them is, "We might as well have spent it as we earned it, because we are no better off than those who are fully dependent on assistance programs".

Why is this? It is because the government has allowed the dollar to depreciate to the point where it bears no relation to its former value. The low-income families, the working poor, are bearing the brunt of inflation. The nation has just experienced a crisis as a result of actions by a group of individuals who, as a result of insecurity, frustration and despair withdrew their services as they fought a losing battle against the galloping increases in the cost of living which were not offset by even a corresponding increase in wages, let alone provisions which would enable them to participate more fairly in the higher standard of living enjoyed by many others in the community.

● (2110)

The middle-income group is finding that what was an income sufficient to meet their basic needs and to assist in contributing to the general well-being of the community has been reduced to the point at which it can barely maintain them in decency. To many of them, the hope of paying for a home has become an illusory dream. Every sector of our economy and of our society is reeling under the impact of the inflationary spiral.

Many letters come to our attention. Allow me to refer to one lady who wrote to me about her problem in meeting the situation and in endeavouring to cope with the increased cost of living. This woman pleaded for action and asked me if I would make xerox copies of her letter and give a copy to everyone in parliament. I appreciate her zeal. I did not do that as I realize every member of parliament gets such letters. She is representative of a host of our citizens who do not know which way to turn. So I urge the government to be serious on this issue. The food prices spiral is crucial and there are plenty of examples to show that.

What about interest rates? We have had four increases in the interest rate on mortgages since the beginning of this year. Think, also, of the price one must pay for gasoline. Every two or three weeks the price of gasoline goes up two, three, four or five cents a gallon. Four months ago in Ottawa one could buy regular gasoline for 39 cents a gallon. Now you cannot get a gallon of regular gasoline for less than 54 cents. That is about a 38 per cent increase in four or five months. One could go on with such examples but I think I have said enough.

On Tuesday, September 4, my leader, commenting on the Prime Minister's ineffective plan to combat inflation, referred to the Minister of Finance and his budget proposals of February 19. My leader said that the proposals really

were a sick joke. Many things which have happened as a result of government action or inaction constitute sick jokes which have been perpetrated on the Canadian people.

The Prime Minister announced on September 4 that further government wheat subsidies would forestall a further price increase of about five cents a loaf in October. Within only a few hours of the Prime Minister's statement, sources in the milling industry were hinting that bread prices would go up anyway. The Minister of Justice (Mr. Lang) who is in charge of the Wheat Board admitted only a day or two later that no agreement had been made with the milling or bakery industry. The two ministers should get together and make sure which story they want to tell the people of Canada.

Then the statement was made regarding gasoline prices and within hours of the statement the price of gasoline had jumped by three cents a gallon at a set of pumps not more than five or six blocks from this chamber. In Montreal, on Friday, just three days after the Prime Minister announced his controls, the Union of Retail Gas Merchants voted to raise their price by three cents a gallon. So we can see how effective—I use that term advisedly, although perhaps I should say "ineffective"—government statements or controls have been in this particular case. The leader and other members of my party have indicated clearly the position that ought to be taken if these problems are to be resolved.

There has been much discussion and controversy over the suggested freeze of prices and wages followed by a period of selective controls where required. The speaker who preceded me pointed out that the implementation of controls similar to those of the United States would not bring beneficial results. I suggest that according to statistics as of January, 1973, inflation in the United States had been reduced to an annual rate of 3.7 per cent and the accelerating trend in wage increases had been halted and even reversed slightly. In addition, these results were achieved while unemployment decreased from 6.1 per cent in August, 1971, to 5 per cent in January, 1973, and output growth advanced from 2.7 per cent in 1971 to 6.5 per cent in 1972. I think that is a better record than this government has been able to achieve.

The Food Prices Review Board must be given some power immediately.

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

**Mr. Patterson:** This must be done if there is to be a solution to the problem of increasing prices. It is interesting to hear the cries of the party to my left, as just the other day the hon. member for Vancouver Kingsway (Mrs. MacInnis) proposed a motion under Standing Order 43 to give the board some teeth, including the power to roll back food prices. As well, the leader of that party has very quickly made an about-face and in the last couple of weeks has been crying for similar action. Where were they some time ago when their voices were needed in order to implement a program such as this? They were determined to sustain in office a government that was not committed to the program they wanted. It seems that they are satisfied with very little on a great many issues in order that they may swing their vote behind the government and