

1,600 TRIBUNALS GRAPPLE WITH PROFITEERING IN GREAT BRITAIN

Great Britain's stupendous effort to grapple with profiteering is just disclosed by the work of 1,600 tribunals, which have prosecuted 7,350 offenders and secured 1,320 convictions with fines aggregating \$35,000.

Besides setting up these local tribunals to which complaints against dealers are submitted, appeal tribunals have been established in specified areas of England, Scotland and Wales. In addition, central committees also have been formed to investigate supposed trusts or monopolies which may be manipulating wholesale prices. This has been done under the Profiteering Act.

Apart from the prosecution of complaints, the Board of Trade, which is charged with the administration of the anti-profiteering law, is independently investigating prices, costs and profits of large number of articles in common use. It has formed a costings committee, composed of distinguished accountants, which is assisting the central committee in its task. A sub-committee on trusts has been empowered to obtain whatever technical and expert assistance may be required.

In scope the Act applies to "any article or class of articles which is one of a kind in common use by the public" or to any "material, machinery or accessories used in the production of such articles." The Act does not apply to "controlled" articles, such as butter, sugar, beer, flour, liquors—commodities for which maximum prices were fixed by war-time legislation.

A clear cut definition of the term "profiteering" has been a point which has given local tribunals much difficulty in the prosecution of their tasks. So far the definition laid down by Sir Auckland Geddes, president of the Board of Trade, has been accepted as a basis for prosecution. It follows: "The making of an unreasonably large profit, all the circumstances being known, by the sale to one's fellow citizens of an article which is one or one of a kind in common use."

Critics of the Government's anti-profiteering machinery point to official figures just published in the Board of Trade's "Labor Gazette," showing that, despite efforts to beat down living costs, the general level of retail prices on October 1 was about 120 per cent. above pre-war figures, or an increase of 5 per cent. as compared with the level of September 1 last, when the local tribunals were just getting under way. But it is not contended even by these fault-finders, that the increase would not have been larger had the Government made no effort to bring the profiteers to book.

Against such objections may be set such testimonials as that of the Yarmouth Profiteering Committee, which claims that a reduction in

wholesale prices by as much as 35 per cent. has been noticeable in that locality.

Local tribunals have been empowered to investigate all claims brought before them and, if the allegations of excessive charges are established, to institute proceedings against the seller before a court of summary jurisdiction, where, upon conviction, fines of not more than \$1,000 or imprisonment for terms not to exceed three months, or both, may be imposed.

Local tribunals all over England have lists of complaints for investigation. The articles range from flannelettes at 36 cents a yard to boot laces at 25 cents a pair; from enameled saucepans at \$1.45 to spools of cotton at 14 cents. A Westminster committee has been called on to investigate a charge of \$125 for a woman's hat, another of \$85 for a coat and skirt and a charge of 8 cents for a breakfast roll.

A complaint was made before the Walton-on-Thames committee of a charge of 62 cents for a lamp shade, which, it was alleged, could be purchased a few miles distant for 32 cents.

At Bangor, a man complained that he had been charged 65 cents for tea for himself and a friend. The committee ordered a refund of 16 cents.

Efforts instituted among retail dealers to check profiteering "higher up" (among the wholesalers) has been of much assistance to the Central Committee in its investigation of twelve or more suspected price "combines," including dealers in boots and shoes, cotton sheeting, tinware, blankets, ready-made clothing, soap, tobacco and medicines.

Imposition of prison sentences has not been uncommon, although it has been a general practice to impose maximum fines in glaring cases of guilt, with a threat of imprisonment should there be a second infraction.

THE BRITISH GENERAL INSURANCE CO., LTD., OF LONDON, ENG., TO ENTER CANADA

It is officially announced that the British General Insurance Company of London, England, will enter Canada for the operation of fire insurance. Mr. Norman M. Walker, managing director of the company, arrived in Montreal last week and while here he announced the appointment of Mr. Thomas F. Dobbin as the company's Canadian manager.

The British General commenced business in 1904 and has made considerable progress under conservative management. The company has a subscribed capital of \$1,250,000, paid-up \$312,000, and reserve funds of \$750,000. Its total assets exceed \$3,000,000.