

Interim Supply

lumber sold here in the east then puts the spread to about 20 per cent before the retailer even makes any profit on his investment, plant and other operations.

Even our freight rates are unrealistic, discriminatory and unfair to the consumers of this country. I have here, Mr. Chairman, a photostatic copy of a C.N.R. freight bill for a carload of spruce lumber shipped from Burns Lake, B.C. to the R. W. Kimmerly Lumber Co. of Napanee, Ont., which is a family firm owned by two of my brothers and in which I was a partner before I was elected to parliament. It cost \$1,008.06 to ship this carload of spruce lumber from Burns Lake, B.C. to Napanee, Ont. This is not even all the way across Canada, since Napanee is at least 1,000 miles from Halifax and Burns Lake is somewhere in the interior of our great west coast province.

● (12:00 noon)

There were 63,400 lbs. of lumber at \$1.59 per cwt. This amounted to about 30,000 board feet of lumber, which puts the cost of this material at about \$33 per thousand board feet for freight alone. Now, Mr. Chairman, I am sure you will agree that this has gone beyond all reason. Here, we have the Canadian National returning huge deficits each year against the taxpayers' account and having to charge such rates as these for cross country carload freight. I wonder what rates they would have to charge to break even, let alone show a profit? Again the poor unfortunate consumer is the one who has to pay the cost.

Let me speak briefly, Mr. Chairman, for one helpless type of consumer, the old age pensioner, the one who is receiving assistance through the Old Age Assistance Act. On three occasions since February 24 of this year, I have asked the Prime Minister and his government if they would do something to assuage the plight of our elderly people, those who are caught in the cruel claws of this Liberal cost of living and who have to attempt to live on a meagre \$75 per month pension. I spoke also in this regard about the inadequate pension for widows of our war veterans who are in a similar plight. The Prime Minister told me on March 15 that if I would just wait until the budget was brought down this question would be taken care of.

Nothing has been done. These consumers I have mentioned are still entangled in the web of want because they cannot possibly run their personal business within their means. The same remarks apply to our farmers who

[Mr. Alkenbrack.]

form a large section of the consuming public. They are caught between the low prices they receive for many of their farm products and the cost of production which is composed of taxes, the cost of equipment, farm machinery, animal husbandry transport and all the other factors that make up what it takes to operate a producing farm.

I could go on, Mr. Chairman, but I know there are others who wish to voice similar opinions concerning the problems of consumers. The small businessmen and retailers are in a very precarious position because of the inflationary escalation of wholesale prices as quoted by large corporations. The small town retailer, be he an independent grocer, hardware merchant, fuel, furniture, clothing or farm supply dealer, never knows from one month to another what the price will be on the next invoice for goods. He is sometimes unfairly criticized by the consumer because he happens to be the last man on the ladder.

Quite often because of commitments that he has to make with the consumer to assist his sales, he is left with a small return. He is forced to provide a lot of services at very little profit, and often loses money on transactions as a result of the inflationary tendencies this government is allowing, and even encouraging, by their policies.

I have one more point to make with regard to consumers. This relates to consumer credit. It is almost impossible for any family to operate without credit. There is a generation of citizens growing up in this country, a generation who are now fathers and mothers of millions of Canadian children, who hardly know what a chartered bank is. Because of a lack of basic credit, because of a lack of security, they have been conducting their business with the finance companies. This generation I have mentioned need to be extricated from their financial entanglement of high interest rates and seemingly never ending payment plans of these finance companies.

I ask you, Mr. Chairman, what chance of financial solvency does a mother or father have if they yield to the television ads with which they are nightly bombarded suggesting that they apply to their friendly finance company for a bill-payer loan at roughly up to 18 per cent interest? We have already waited a long time for the amendments to the Bank Act. These should have been a matter of first priority. We should have completed this legislation long ago. A few minutes ago I mentioned retail businesses in our typical