

*Cost of Living*

wealthy but the necessities of life, a decent home, adequate clothing and nutritious food, that add up to inflation. We have usually thought of poverty, frustration and despair as conditions of people in the underdeveloped nations of the world. Often we have offered a few dollars to assist them in their quest for a decent standard of living. Canadians are presently faced with the fact that these conditions are becoming a stark reality to an increasing number of our own people who are totally unable to stretch their eroding dollars to get a roof over their heads, clothes on their backs and food in their stomachs.

I suggest, Mr. Speaker, that members of this House should recall one cold day last January—January 12, to be specific. It was a Friday. On that day my leader stood up in the chamber and asked the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) what he and his ministers were planning to do about the tremendous rise in the consumer price index. In particular, he asked the Prime Minister if he had instructed his ministers to prepare a series of interim emergency measures to halt or at least reduce the erosion of Canada's purchasing power. The Prime Minister's reply is recorded at page 227 of *Hansard* as follows:

If the leader of the opposition is thinking about price and wage controls, the government has already stated its position on that question, that we have contingency plans which we will bring into action if necessary but that we would give no advance notice if we were going to do so.

If hon. members care to check the *Hansard* index under the heading "Price and Wage Control—Contingency Plans" they will find 21 other references to those contingency plans between January 12 and June 6. The index ends there, but I am sure if we had a recent one we would find more references to those contingency plans.

I wonder what the government is really trying to do. What are the contingency plans? What is it that they have been keeping up their sleeve to bring out in the case of an emergency? I would suggest that if we have not reached a state of emergency at the present time, then my understanding of the word "emergency" is rather uncertain. I believe today, Mr. Speaker, that the government is endeavouring to fool the people of Canada into believing that it is responsible and competent while it knows right well that it has failed to deal with the problems and has proven itself both irresponsible and incompetent.

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

**Mr. Patterson:** As for the contingency plans, Mr. Speaker, I would suggest that the government does not have any. They are mythical plans. In this respect, I am reminded of the words of a popular song of not so long ago. The writer could very well have been the Prime Minister, and the singer possibly the Minister of Finance (Mr. Turner). The song goes like this:

Don't be afraid; it will not harm you. It's only me pursuing something I'm not sure of; across my dreams with nets of wonder I chase the bright elusive butterfly of love.

**Mr. Turner (Ottawa-Carleton):** That is beautiful.

**Mr. Patterson:** I would suggest that these nebulous contingency plans that the Prime Minister keeps referring

[Mr. Patterson.]

to are even more elusive for the Canadian people than the "elusive butterfly of love" in the song.

Here we are, in the middle of the month of September, nearly nine months after the Prime Minister's first reference to these contingency plans, and the government has failed to produce anything. The government may have laboured during those nine months, although this is questionable, but the fact is it has produced nothing. Prices continue to rise at an unprecedented rate. The government's \$40,000 a year Beryl Plumptre tells the people of Canada that they do not need to buy food, and the House of Commons giant killer, the leader of the New Democratic Party (Mr. Lewis), seems to have difficulty in bringing his own group to the point where they are prepared to exercise their responsibility and show by their actions what they have been saying for months and months, that this government does not deserve the confidence of the Canadian people.

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

**Mr. Patterson:** Note what one columnist wrote concerning this situation. In the Montreal *Star* of August 15, W. A. Wilson quoted one deeply despondent Liberal who is, he tells us, a figure of consequence in the party. Referring to the hon. member for York South, this renowned Liberal said:

He can't put up with us much longer if he wants to survive himself. He'd be better off to kick us out and pick up the Liberal votes in Ontario especially.

Then Wilson writes:

—with a sudden outburst of bitterness, this great Liberal exclaimed, "This is not an accident—it's just drunk driving."

There we have it, Mr. Speaker. It was on the same day last January to which I referred earlier that my colleague the hon. member for Prince Edward-Hastings (Mr. Hees) told the Prime Minister that it would take months and months for the government to bring the problem of increases in food prices before parliament in any meaningful way. What was the Prime Minister's answer? He said:

No, it will not take months if the opposition has a clear position on it, which is doubtful.

Now, Mr. Speaker, it appears that the Prime Minister does not have any answer to the problem. He is looking for the answers. I would suggest that the leader of my party has set out in very clear terms what we believe and what we are convinced would take us at least on the road to a constructive solution to the problems facing the country at the present time.

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

**Mr. Patterson:** Every sector of the nation is reeling under the impact of spiralling prices, but most of all those on fixed incomes and those on pensions. I do not know what one hon. member was trying to prove today when he spoke about senior citizens being well taken care of, and so on. If we listen to the pleas that come to our ears and read the letters that come to our desks, we find that the senior citizens are facing problems they have never faced before. It seems that even though increases have been granted, they are not keeping up with the increasing cost of living. We think of those on fixed incomes who find it