

Increasing Food Prices

Mr. Woolliams: The price of hamburger ranges between 65 and 75 cents a pound. Liver costs between 80 and 90 cents a pound; roasting beef costs \$1.20 a pound and more; even beef for boiling costs between 90 cents and \$1 per pound. That is what we are talking about. We are concerned about food costs which the consumer, the man on fixed income, must bear. We are not saying that the farmer, the primary producer, is getting enough. Although we pay 90 cents per pound or more for liver, the top price for steers in this country—I checked this today—ranges between 34 and 38 cents a pound. If you compare the price of the steer per pound with the price of liver, hamburger or steak, you will find that there is a large difference. That is the problem.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Woolliams: Mr. Speaker, many of our difficulties stem from the government's decision to allow our dollar to float. We export many agricultural commodities. The government, by allowing our dollar to float, has not diminished the difficulties faced by our agricultural producers. With the floating of our dollar the agricultural producer receives less in the export market for his commodity. He gets less for his grain and for his beef because of our floating dollar. Yet the government has done nothing.

We are also concerned about the health and welfare of our senior citizens, veterans and others. The government has been so preoccupied with curbing inflation that it has created unemployment; people have lost their jobs. The kind of inflation which began under this government is continuing. Our people must pay high taxes in addition to high costs occasioned by inflation. The hon. member for Fraser Valley East touched on this subject. Let us consider for a moment—

An hon. Member: And legal fees.

Mr. Woolliams:—how this government has been spending our money. For 1970-71 the government budgeted for expenditures of \$13,182 million, compared with \$11,921 million for 1969-70. The increase is in the order of \$1,260 million. Estimates for the various departments increased by between 23 per cent and 38 per cent. So government spending has been increased. We know that the cabinet was warned by Mr. Young that the real cause of inflation, or a major cause, is overspending by the government. That spending is driving up costs, increasing living costs and affecting food costs which the consumer must meet. That is what we ought to examine at this time.

Let us see how our tax dollar is spent. Since this government took office, it has financed its operations with deficits. Today 14 cents of every tax dollar collected from the Canadian taxpayer goes to pay interest on the national debt; 13 cents of every tax dollar goes on defence; 7 cents on transportation and communications; and on health and welfare, the biggest single item, the government spends 25 cents out of every tax dollar. What really concerns Canadians is the high cost of government.

An hon. Member: The hon. member speaks as a Conservative.

Mr. Woolliams: Oh, I don't know. Let us wait for the election. I think hon. members will find, when the election rolls around, that the people know that the number one enemy they must turn out of office is the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) along with the puppets who follow him. That is what they will decide at the polls.

An hon. Member: The people will not go for puppeteers.

Mr. Woolliams: Hon. members talk about the high cost of living and the high cost of food. Well, let us examine this government's dairy policy and see what has been the result of the kind of quotas it has imposed on the dairy industry in western Canada. Today there is a shortage of butter. We are importing butter from New Zealand and Australia. These are some of the problems. Not only has the government driven people out of the dairy industry but it has increased the price of butter and other dairy products to the consumer. This affects the people I mentioned in opening my remarks. These are the facts.

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The real enemy of the consumer is the increase in government expenditures. This government has spent itself right out of the Gallup poll. That is what worried the Minister of Agriculture this evening. It was not that he was upset about the debate, or got sunstroke when he went to Medicine Hat last week and found things operating well. The real reason is that the Gallup poll shows that the Liberals are slipping because they have not come to grips with any of our problems. Nothing has been done with regard to the high cost of food and the high cost of living.

I want to turn now to another subject. The hon. member for Fraser Valley East talked about transportation costs. Ever since the Railway Act was amended by the Liberal government and the new transportation commission was set up which enabled the railways, except for the Crownsnest Pass freight rates, to increase freight rates from eastern to western Canada, and from eastern Canada to the Maritimes and vice versa, the cost of living has spiralled in all areas.

A former minister of transport, Hon. Jack Pickersgill, has not done anything to stop the increase, nor has the federal Liberal cabinet stepped in to prevent this discrimination in freight rates for the west and the Maritimes. It has been said that Canada is held together by its transportation system. It is one of the cornerstones of confederation at which this government has chipped away until we can now see that the whole question of freight rates is in a chaotic state, even beyond the repair of Mr. Pickersgill who set himself up as the czar of transportation. Freight rates have increased on some commodities from the west to the east, and vice versa, between 40 and 60 per cent.

The government should be concerned about the control of inflation, but it has done nothing. The cabinet will not give leadership in this field and the transport commission has not done anything but allow freight rates to spiral. This has affected the cost of food and the cost of living of every Canadian.

I repeat that the real enemy, the cause of inflation and the real heel crushing down on the pensioner, the veteran and those on fixed income, is excessive government