

*Supply—Trade and Commerce*

**Mr. Thatcher:** Mr. Chairman, I think that is a very encouraging feature. Will the minister state who decides what new statistics or what new publications will be put out? Does he decide that himself?

**Mr. Howe:** There is an advisory publications board to the bureau and that board decides whether a request for information should be granted, and whether the subject matter should be reported each year or reported periodically.

**Mr. Thatcher:** I thank the minister, and I hope this year he will continue doing the same thing because I believe there are a few more that could be eliminated.

**Mr. Fleming:** Mr. Chairman, I should like to make a comment under this item concerning the proposed new consumer price index. I believe that all members must be conscious of the shortcomings of the present cost-of-living index, the basis of which goes back a great many years. No one, I am sure, is going to argue that there is not some reason for revising the basis of the index. On the other hand, Mr. Chairman, I submit that it is altogether desirable that while the new consumer price index is being introduced, the old index should be carried on for a considerable length of time. In a return tabled on May 8 by the parliamentary assistant, it was indicated that the new consumer price index would not commence before the summer of 1952. I am urging that the present index should be published for a considerable period of time after the new index comes into publication, and along with the new index.

I am basing that partly on the fact that a great many labour agreements have features which are tied to the present cost-of-living index. I am also proposing it upon the ground that the public is entitled to have a continuing basis of comparison with costs which it has been accustomed to over a period of years. That is not to detract from the idea of the new consumer price index, which I have no doubt will become a more accurate gauge of movements in general price levels so far as they affect the consumer than the old cost of living index. I think the public, for its information, is entitled to a continuance of the index to which it has been accustomed for a long time. It would be misleading simply to base our conceptions of living costs and the value of the Canadian dollar on the base period proposed by the new consumer price index, which is to be the year 1949. I hope that we are never going to become so adjusted, never going to come to the point where we are so ready to accept 1949 price levels as being a standard that we will simply

accept the new consumer price index as one that does not for its full understanding require to be referred back and related to an entirely different basis. For that reason, Mr. Chairman, so that the public may be able to have a reasonably accurate gauge by which to measure price trends so far as they affect the consumer, and to relate those to a period that we hope is more normal than the period in which we are living so far as consumer prices are concerned, I am urging that the present cost of living index should continue to be published for some time to come, even after the new consumer price index has come to be published.

**Mr. Howe:** That is the intention. The first index under the new list of commodities will be published for the month of July, and for a time both indexes will be published side by side. I may say that—I do not know why—my hon. friend seems to want to perpetuate the years 1935-39 as typical. I think perhaps he is deceiving himself; I do not think he is deceiving anybody else. I hope I do not live to see conditions go back to the 1935-39 level. But it has been the custom every ten years or so to change the index, and to take a new base. That has been happening probably ever since a cost of living index was published. It happens here; it happens in the United States as well. They have just shifted to a new base—I am not sure what their base is. We think the year 1949 is the last year for which we will have full statistics upon which to base an index, so that the index will start off not at 100 but probably at 120 or 125 or somewhere in that range. But as long as we have a base which is reasonably representative of the period under discussion I do not think the year is important. If my hon. friend can see something sacred in the years 1935-39 we might consider immortalizing them and keeping them forever, but I think he would have to explain it pretty carefully.

**Mr. Fleming:** I can assure the minister that I would not wish the years 1935-39 to be regarded permanently as typical, because these were years of Liberal administration. I would not want to think that that was typical.

**Mr. Howe:** You would like to go back to 1930-35.

**Mr. Fleming:** You said 1935-39, and there is my answer on that.

The minister has indicated that the old index is going to be carried on for a period of time. It is a question of the length of it. I asked the minister a question on this subject in the house some weeks ago, when the