

Extravagance a Cause of High Cost of Living

The Time Has Arrived for Canadians to Take Stock--Perhaps a Food Dictator would be a Blessing--Heavier Taxation Might Put a Stop to Speculation

By E. S. BATES.

Wear rubbers and save leather for our soldiers in Europe. Such is the significant suggestion handed out by one of our largest rubber concerns. Good advertising, but the suggestion contains much food for sound thought. Leather prices have advanced to an unheard of level. Only recently a Boston manufacturer predicted that shoes now selling at ten dollars a pair would be selling at thirty dollars a pair before the end of the war. Leather, the best to be had, is needed and urgently needed, for the troops, and there is not a sufficient supply of the raw material to fill the world demand. On the other hand, the production of crude rubber is more than keeping pace with the demand. Britain fairly well controls the rubber output of the world. The result is that rubber has not advanced in price, and it is now cheaper to wear rubber than leather footwear. Hence the suggestion.

It is clearly patent that the only effective solution of the high cost of living problem in Canada lies in a combination of increased production and thrift. If the welfare of the troops was the first and chief consideration of everyone in Canada this combination would exist, and Canada would not be facing an acute problem in the rising cost of foodstuffs and necessary commodities. Moreover, there would be a greater portion available for the men in the field.

We must face the bold fact that Canada did not come up to the mark in the matter of production of foodstuffs during the past summer. Under the strong patriotic appeal the year 1915 was made a banner one in the annals of Canadian farm production. Our record grain crop, our record fruit crop, our vegetable crop, etc., regulated the world's supply of foodstuffs to such an extent that prices were maintained at little above the normal level up until a few months ago, and we made it easier for the War Office to keep the soldiers well-fed. Of course, the situation was helped along by a similar record production by the American farmers. But patriotism without being upheld by practical deeds, is an intangible thing. The fear that possessed us all on this continent, fear of starvation, was allayed. Dollars shone brighter than patriotism and banished fear. The weather-man is blamed, but selfishness is one real cause. America has not toed the scratch. Canada, the granary of the Empire, failed to fill the bins to overflowing. When the need was greatest we failed to produce.

Consider other lines of marketable commodities. In no case was the opportunity presented, as in the case of foodstuffs, to replenish depleted stores. In the case of woolen goods large quantities of wool fibre have been absolutely destroyed by fire and explosion in the shape of clothing and supplies. These goods are absolutely withdrawn from the world market. They cannot be utilized again as shoddy and wool stock. Vast quantities of cotton have been used in the manufacture of explosives, and destroyed. In neither case is the world's annual production sufficient, without enormous effort, to supply even normal demands without the reworking of worn-out cloth, or the substitution of other fibres, or change in style. Leather and hardware are somewhat similar from the commercial point of view. Providence has ordained that the greatest necessity of mankind, foodstuffs, is the only necessity wherein opportunity is given annually to replenish depleted stocks.

Eliminate extravagance by compulsory means, make thrift obligatory, regulate spending, and there will be enough to go round. The soldier must not be deprived of one iota of his fare. This is our solemn duty.

A short time ago a prominent speaker addressing an audience of women blamed the middleman, cold storage, and all the time-honored, so-called excuses for the present condition of prices. Eliminate the middleman and cold storage, or control them, boycott the merchant, he said in substance, and institute co-operative methods and we shall have the ideal state: co-operative buying and co-operative production, co-operative selling and co-operative consumption, and we shall produce what we need and have it at the proper price. Still they ramp and rave, but it availeth not. The ideal state is yet

a long, long-way off. Social reformers, idealists and soap-box orators will have just cause for their effort so long as democracy exists and man remains a free-will agent.

The soldier in action is shot for getting drunk while on duty, yet there is no restriction, or scarcely any, on the civilian in Canada. The soldier on active service is deprived of his pay if he overstays his leave, or breaks some minor military law, but the stay-at-home roams the streets at will, a free-will agent. Why the inequality?

A year ago the War Lord of Hundum said, "Let there be thrift," and there was thrift with a vengeance. We liked to gloat over it. It gave us satisfaction. But all the time returned soldiers and officers told us that German prisoners are a well-fed looking lot. A year later the United Kingdom follows suit. Food control under the direction of a food dictator, and not a whimper from the Englishman. A boat is sunk to-day, one yesterday, two the day before, another to-morrow, and so on for weeks and months. Each boat carries foodstuffs, or provisions, or something needed. Consumption grows apace. Soldiers must be fed, and well-fed, so a food dictator is appointed to tell the people what they can eat, how much and where they must practice thrift. It brings home the full significance of war.

How about Canada? We still go on with scarcely a change from normal conditions, except that it costs more to live. Trade reports in all lines state that retail and wholesale business could not be better. A few lines of luxuries are withdrawn from the market, because they cannot be obtained, but Canadians generally are as well-fed, well-dressed, well-entertained and well-housed as ever they were. The only commodity of which there is an over supply is money, and bank deposits continue to grow. Only the laborer and the salary man are paying the price. There is no concerted effort to save. It is the mechanic, the speculator and the munition manufacturer who is accounting for the increasing bank balances. The butcher shops are experiencing no decrease in sales. The theatres and other places of amusement are filled, and luxuries are just as salable.

There is a lot of satisfaction to be gained from Canada's temporarily strong condition. But while we are piling up prosperity throughout the country, manufacturing millionaires by the dozens and inflating prices of commodities, what about our part in the prosecution of the great war? Our farmers are buying butter and grumbling at the price, because they can make more by turning their milk into cheese. Mechanics grumble at the rising cost of foodstuffs, but are buying phonographs, Ford cars, fancy dresses and furs at a rate unheard of in pre-war days. We have been carried away on a wave of artificial prosperity. Shortly we shall crest the wave and no one knows the depths of the other side. The rising cost of living is but one result of our insanity caused by our greed in face of our temporary prosperity. Every atom of our prosperity has been fought for and paid for by our brothers on the battlefields of Europe. Their suffering and sacrifice has purchased our peace and prosperity.

People say that war is abnormal, therefore war is a disturbing factor in all industrial and investment values. One writer says, "The world's work is forward moving; the world's hope is forward-looking. Therefore, all 'business' has an expectancy in life." They justify their actions in this way, saying, "Ah, well, we shall be better prepared to look after the returned soldiers, and meet after the war conditions than we would otherwise." Meanwhile crowded meetings are being held in every city in the Dominion. Crowded by the poor who are bearing the unequal burden. And such resolutions as the following are passed unanimously:

"Whereas the prices of the necessities of life have risen enormously during the last few years, and especially the last two years; whereas the outlook for the future promises that the prices may be raised higher; whereas monopolists of the food supplies pile up millions of dollars in profits while hunger and insecurity is the lot of the masses of the

people; whereas speculation, monopoly of the food supplies in the hands of a comparatively few people, and the lack of European competition, have to a great extent caused the rise in prices; whereas the wages of the working people have not risen to such a level as to cope with the high prices; and whereas private ownership of the food supplies is not competent to deal now with the food supplies of the people;

"Therefore, be it resolved: (1) That the Dominion Government take over the control of the food supply (2) that a maximum price be fixed on the most important articles of the necessities of life; (3) that a legal minimum wage be enforced so that the food supply should be at the disposal of all the people; and (4) that customs duties on foodstuffs be removed."

The resolution is a trifle strong, perhaps. But it indicates the trend of public opinion. The time has arrived for Canadians to take stock—an inventory of what we are doing in the prosecution of the great war. Three hundred and fifty thousand of Canada's manhood are fighting for the cause of the Empire. These men are bearing the brunt of danger and hardship. How many Canadians at home thoroughly realize the real meaning of war? It may be that Canada should become a bit more militaristic, for the time being at least. Perhaps, a food dictator would be a blessing. Heavier taxation might put a stop to speculation.

WOMEN'S INFLUENCE IN BUSINESS.

Mrs. Almy Discusses the Special Need and Ability of Women in Retail Trade.

"The woman in business has created a new standard," said Mrs. Almy in the course of an interesting address before the Montreal Publicity Association last week. Mrs. Almy, the head of the great departmental store in Montreal and a chain of similar stores throughout the States, is well qualified, as a successful business woman, to express her opinion on the future of women in salesmanship, publicity and window decoration as well as executive positions in a large departmental store.

With reference to the enormous activity of women since the war, Mrs. Almy pointed out that women had shown a tremendous aptitude for business as well as a usefulness in factories. Society women had organized bazaars, and in one case in her mind they had at one stroke sold at half price enough admission tickets in one or two days to pay all the expenses of a great bazaar which was to bring in hundreds of thousands of dollars, and perhaps a million. Any merchant who could meet his expenses for the year in two days would be exceedingly well satisfied with himself.

"A woman," said Mrs. Almy, "has a very peculiar aptitude for business, and the most useful thing is her power of intuition. She understands how dress appeals to women, for instance, and if she can succeed in making a customer look well she is always going to have that customer on her list."

"The wise merchant has grasped this fact. His road to success is plain. He needs women trained to understand woman's nature, woman's needs, her love for beauty, her necessity for stylish dress suitable for all occasions, her comforts, her necessities and those of every member of the home and the home itself. In answer to his need for women trained in salesmanship, versed in processes and products of manufacture and their markets knowing the latest fashion of the hour as well as woman's nature. There have arisen schools of salesmanship, retail classes in the business courses of high schools, continuation and vocational schools and comprehensive courses of business in college and university. Out of the logical connection between the lady who buys and the one who sells comes the knowledge of the right goods to be chosen by the buyer of the department who is frequently now a woman. In many of the most successful department and apparel stores of the present day where intensive methods prevail women are not only managers of departments but organizers, counselors, accountants, solvers of store problems, decorators, advertisers, proprietors, and at every step they use that peculiar, wonderful, unexplicable gift of woman called intuition."

Mrs. Almy concluded by describing a great French establishment managed and owned by a woman, and the perfection she found everywhere. In France she had found it to be the rule than men made things, were specialists in making things while women ran the business and did the bargaining. There was not a silver coin and not a stamp on a letter in France which did not carry the design of a fine, graceful woman with her face towards the dawn, and her hands sowing the seeds of commerce.