

As I said at the beginning of this debate, there are some evils that publicity will cure which penalty will never cure, and there are none of that category which will disappear before an informed public opinion more quickly than anti-social evils, such as profiteering and hoarding at times like the present; the very evils which this committee is being appointed to investigate.

As against the attitude taken by hon. gentlemen opposite in this debate with respect to the appointment of a committee to investigate the cost of living and the rise in prices, may I give to the house the attitude of the Liberal party in regard to the two other large investigations on the cost of living and prices which have been held in previous parliaments. Two committees have been referred to repeatedly in this debate, and my remarks in regard to what was said in discussion of these committees have been frequently quoted. I notice that, in all these quotations, hon. gentlemen opposite were very careful not to quote the really important part, namely, the attitude of the Liberal party toward the appointment of a committee. They did try to construe other parts as having a different meaning from what they were ever intended to have. But the position of the Liberal party in regard to both of these committees is quite clear. The first committee was appointed in 1919. Sir Thomas White, who was then minister of finance in the Conservative government of the day, moved for the appointment of a committee to study the question of the cost of living. That motion was brought forward and it was carried unanimously. There was not the loss of a day; there was not the loss of an hour. The matter went through this house in accordance with what the house believed at that time was the wish and feeling of the public in a matter of this kind. The feeling today is just the same as it was then, and many of the reasons for the committee are just the same as they were at that time.

What about the price spreads committee of 1934, which was moved for by Mr. Bennett? That is the debate from which, to a greater or lesser extent, my remarks have been quoted. Let me give the house exactly what I said in speaking in that debate on the appointment of a committee to investigate. I quote from *Hansard* of February 2, 1934, at page 217, in the debate on the appointment of the price spreads committee:

May I say a further word in order that there may be no misunderstanding of my attitude or of that of the party on this side of the house? We have repeatedly stated—and indeed the legislation that has been introduced under the former Liberal administration shows the evidence of our belief—that we believed there are

[Mr. Mackenzie King.]

many evils of a class which publicity would do more to cure than penalty. Certainly evils which are in the nature of anti-social practices, if that term may be used to cover what I think we all have in mind, namely, the kind of thing that enables the mean man to profit by virtue of his meanness, are perhaps more effectually cured by publicity than by aught else. Anything which will throw light upon these anti-social practices is, I believe, wholly in the public interest. Certainly the kind of practices set forth in the resolution as introduced by the government, constitutes a class of evils from which this country is today suffering to a great degree in common with other countries throughout the world. I doubt very much if there is a single evil that more affects the well-being of consumers than those agreements which artificially fix or control prices and one way or another restrict and hamper trade. The internal trade of our country has become honey-combed and enmeshed by secret understandings and agreements. So far as the Liberal opposition is concerned, we heartily welcome anything that will throw light upon this class of evils. I can say for the official opposition that its members will join very cordially and wholeheartedly with the Prime Minister and his friends in endeavouring to make the investigation just as thorough as it can possibly be made.

That is what the government is seeking to do today, to have a committee appointed which will make an investigation, as thorough as it can possibly be made, into this great question.

Hon. gentlemen opposite have helped to make it as difficult as possible to get this committee appointed. It is now for them to say what their attitude is to be when it comes to a vote on this question. Let me tell hon. gentlemen immediately that they will have an opportunity to vote on this question. I should say again the government is asking this house, and asking everyone in this house, to assist it in appointing a committee to investigate the recent rise in the cost of living. The government intends to appoint that committee regardless of any attitude taken by the opposition to obstruct it. We do hope that, in the end, all will join and do their best, as we believe the country will wish us all to do, in furthering the work of this committee. But if they are not prepared to do that, they will be answerable, not to the government, but to parliament, to their constituencies, and to the people whose interests we are here to serve.

The house divided on the motion (Mr. Mackenzie King) which was agreed to on the following division:

YEAS

Messrs:

Arsenault
Beaudoin
Beaudry

Benidickson
Bertrand (Laurier)
Bertrand (Prescott)