

Before doing that, however, I want to point out to this house that when the government desires to do something rapidly it can find plenty of power. When the government does not want to do something, then it can find all kinds of ways to stall; and that is what we have here. I can remember during the last session of parliament, and even during the session of 1946, hearing warnings from this side of the house. It is not often I agree with my Conservative friends, but some of them did warn this government that there would be a shortage of United States exchange in this country before very long. I remember the Minister of Finance (Mr. Abbott) pooh-poohing the idea, as of no particular importance, as late as June or July of 1947. Then it finally caught up with him. Did the government call parliament and invite this house to set up a committee to investigate ways and means to deal with the situation? No. They moved with the rapidity of a rattlesnake and right away prohibited the importation of a great many necessary things from the United States in order to begin conserving American dollars. No committee. No stall. They acted with great speed, as they can when they feel the time is suitable to do so. Not only did they move rapidly in restricting these imports; they moved just as rapidly in placing a heavy excise tax on a great many things manufactured in Canada, with the immediate result that only those in the higher income groups were able to buy those commodities and pay that tax. Those in the lower income groups were having a hard enough time getting along, and were completely shut out of that market. As I say, when the government wanted to do that they did not set up a committee. They did not know under what law they could take action. In fact we have been told in the house that they were doubtful about their power, but suddenly they discovered that, under the regulations governing the foreign exchange control board, they had the power necessary; and they did it.

I submit that, while that was a serious matter, it was no more serious for the people of this country than the high prices which prevail at the present time. I remember quite well another time when the government acted very quickly. That was early in the session of 1946, when the then minister of finance informed the house, without any previous word whatever, that the wartime prices and trade board had given permission to Canadian manufacturers of farm machinery to increase the prices of that machinery by 12½ per cent. No committee was set up. We asked for an investigation to show us there was good

[Mr. Bentley.]

reason for the increase, but in that case the government did not need a committee. They acted rapidly without it, and we were disappointed in the result. Shortly after that, or along about the same time, without any reference at all to a committee, the government moved swiftly to permit a \$5 increase in the basic price of steel.

Then, at the end of the session of 1946, as has been mentioned here previously, by vote of this house, with all political lines dropped, the government was given complete authority to continue the subsidy on milk. That was a non-party decision. Every party, I believe with few dissenters, agreed to it. The government did not set up a committee to find out what made parliament do that. It did not set up a committee to find out whether or not it was necessary. It simply ignored the wishes of parliament, with no reference at all to any committee. No committee was set up when coarse grains were released from control last fall. No committees were set up when a great number of these things were done. I am beginning to think this government has some particular ulterior—I withdraw that word, Mr. Speaker; it is wrong—some hidden reason for wanting this committee to stall this particular investigation.

I want to mention something else the government did without consultation with this house and without reference to a committee, which to me was one of the most reprehensible things the government has ever done. I should have known better, but I did not believe it when I saw in a newspaper a few days ago that the government actually had passed an order in council withholding compulsory savings to be applied against arrears of income tax. So I asked a question in the house, and I was amazed when the Minister of National Revenue (Mr. McCann) replied that such was the case, and that the authority was P.C. 28 passed on January 8 of this year. No committee was set up to decide whether the government had the right to withhold money which had been taken from the people in the first place by compulsory methods, with a promise made then and repeated since that the money would be returned at a certain time. I think that action was most reprehensible, and certainly the government took it without reference to any kind of committee.

I said at the beginning that I was going to submit what I thought was some fairly conclusive evidence as to why prices are high. Tonight my colleague the hon. member for Assiniboia (Mr. McCullough) put some price increases on record. These prices which I shall quote are f.o.b. Saskatoon. I shall not