

on which price increases are being studied are fine papers, rubber tires, scrap metal, steel plate, cold storage charges—

Mr. Howe: Honey.

Mr. Basford:—dyes, detergents, undergarments, lubricating oil, silicates, coffee, to which the hon. member for Nanaimo-Cowichan-The Islands (Mr. Douglas) referred the other day, honey, to which the hon. member has just referred, canned foods, peanut butter, in which the hon. member for Peace River (Mr. Baldwin) has an interest, margarine, meats, grapefruit juice, edible oils, shortening and prescription baby foods. That is an outline of some of the reviews that the commission currently has underway.

Of interest to this House, and particularly to me as Minister of Consumer Affairs, is the concern and interest of the commission in the prices of food and household items which are of such vital concern to Canadian consumers. As a result of that concern the Prices and Incomes Commission has established close liaison with the main retail outlets in both the general merchandise and the grocery sectors. On a systematic basis these sources are being asked to report markups and changes in prices at the retail level for consumer-sensitive items. There is already evidence that this procedure has restrained or prevented price increases in certain food products. Where price increases have already taken place, these are being investigated primarily to determine whether they meet the pricing criteria established by the National Conference on Price Stability.

I did not have an opportunity to participate in the debate yesterday. However, I notice that a number of members were critical of the work of the Prices and Incomes Commission. That criticism has also come forward in the Standing Committee on Health, Welfare and Social Affairs which is examining the estimates of the commission. I wish to put on record that while we have a long way to go and a great task to perform in controlling inflation in this country, we are meeting with some success, considerably more than many other countries who have economies similar to Canada's.

According to the latest available figures, converted mathematically to a common 1963 basis, in December, 1969, we in Canada had a year-over-year percentage change of 4.6 per cent in the consumer price index and a .4 per cent change in the monthly index for last December. In the United Kingdom, with a government in power that is philosophically

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aligned with the New Democratic Party, there was a 4.7 per cent year-over-year increase—not as good as Canada's—and a December increase of .6 per cent, again not as good as Canada's.

The United States, with an economy very similar to ours, had a year-over-year increase for 1969 of 6.2 per cent compared with Canada's 4.6 per cent, and a December increase of .7 per cent compared with Canada's .4 per cent. France had a year-over-year increase of 5.9 per cent and a December increase of .3 per cent. Japan had a year-over-year increase of 6.4 per cent compared with Canada's 4.6 per cent, and a December increase of .7 per cent.

• (3:20 p.m.)

Mr. Stanfield: Mr. Speaker, may I ask the minister a question?

Mr. Basford: I would be happy to answer.

Mr. Stanfield: Would he tell us what the unemployment rate is in those countries?

Mr. Basford: I do not have those figures in my book here.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Basford: I would be glad to obtain them. We have made clear, however, that the more successful the program of the Prices and Incomes Commission is in securing price and wage restraint, the more rapidly we can relax certain aspects of fiscal and monetary policy. I find this difficult to drill into the heads of hon. members opposite; I regret that after a year and a half the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Stanfield) still does not appreciate this.

Mr. Baldwin: Tell the unemployed.

Mr. Stanfield: Try to persuade the Minister of Finance (Mr. Benson).

Mr. Basford: I hear a good deal of chatter from the members of the New Democratic Party but I have difficulty determining what their position is—today it is one thing and tomorrow it is something else. I can only rely on the records of this House and on the Order Paper to help me determine what position they take. I refer hon. members to a motion in the name of the hon. member for Vancouver-Kingsway (Mrs. MacInnis), a leading member of the NDP caucus. This motion, No. 34, urges the government to—

—give consideration to the advisability of constituting a prices review board . . . such board to operate publicly and with consumer representation and