

*The Address—Mr. St. Laurent*

I have said that the average rate paid to labour in our manufacturing industries provides a greater purchasing power today than it did before the war. I must confess that I was led into this by a tabulation which had been made in the United States to show what an hour's wage down there purchased in terms of certain foodstuffs. I asked to have a similar tabulation prepared for Canada and I have here figures showing the estimates of food quantities which one hour's work of a manufacturing employee at average wages would buy in certain periods. While the first item is not disappointing, it does show that in October 1939 an hour's work would purchase more sirloin beef than it does at the present time. The figures follow:

	October 1939	October 1950	June 1951
Sirloin beef .....lbs.	1.6	1.2	1.1
Bacon .....lbs.	1.3	1.5	1.7
Eggs .....dozen	1.2	1.5	1.6
Potatoes .....lbs.	22.8	36.5	39.1
Bread .....lbs.	7.3	9.5	9.9
Milk .....quarts	4.1	5.6	5.9
Tea .....lbs.	.7	1.0	1.1
Coffee .....lbs.	1.1	1.1	1.1
Sugar, granulated ...lbs.	6.8	8.5	9.0
Butter .....lbs.	1.4	1.5	1.7

On September 20, 1951, the president of the Canadian Federation of Agriculture was discussing high prices and I have here certain excerpts from what he said:

Food prices are not high in relation to other prices or in relation to wage rates or to the profits being made by industry. Most food, in terms of the hours of work required to purchase it, is cheaper than it has ever been. When we compare average hourly earnings in manufacturing industries with average prices of staple food products, this fact is borne out.

He goes on to give other examples.

Others who can control their production and who do set or help establish their price or wage levels, have been more responsible for the high price structure of today than has the farmer.

Labour uses the strike to force wages up, and maintain them. Industry uses resale price maintenance, not only to establish their own prices to consumers, but also to fix the margin for the distributor in between.

Resale price maintenance is a form of price fixing. If businessmen want free enterprise and want farmers and others to compete in a competitive market, why don't they do so themselves? Resale price maintenance ought to be made illegal and prosecuted as a restraint of trade.

In my opinion, there are just as many low income farm families as there are low income urban families.

And today, because of a high price structure, many farm families have to do without lots of things that are considered ordinary necessities in the average urban home.

If some food prices are high for the low income large families—as they undoubtedly are—aren't we all helping them out by paying taxes for family allowances? Canada paid around \$300 million in family allowances last year.

So the situation is that there are large sectors of the population of this country whose incomes have not only kept up with but a little ahead of the increasing cost of living, contrary to what has happened in the United Kingdom. In the United Kingdom the index of wages has been a little slower in its rises than the index in the official cost of living since the war. In this country it has been a little in advance of the index of the cost of living. That does not mean that there are not large numbers of people who are finding it difficult to pay these high prices. This has not passed unnoticed.

The leader of the opposition says that a pension of \$40 per month is not much better than \$20 per month used to be. It was \$20 per month before the war; the pension has been doubled, but the cost of living index has not quite doubled. I believe there is going to be substantial relief through the payment of this "no means test" pension to all persons over 70 years of age. There are many persons whom we know and meet socially who are on retiring allowances, not very large, for whom an additional \$40 per month, or if both members of the family are over 70 an additional \$80 per month, is going to be of substantial help in meeting this higher cost of living.

**Mr. Knowles:** Will the Prime Minister permit a question before he leaves that table dealing with the purchasing power of an hour's labour in Canada? Has he a similar table for the United States?

**Mr. St. Laurent:** I have not it here, but I have it in my office. It was because I saw a table prepared for the United States that I asked to have the Canadian table prepared. I shall get it and let the hon. member see it.

**Mr. Knowles:** Perhaps the Prime Minister would let me have it when I speak.

**Mr. St. Laurent:** I have no objection. I believe it is not only permissible but it is our duty to bring before the house and the public all the pertinent facts that can help to form a sound conclusion, not only about what is desirable but what is practicable under present conditions.

The leader of the opposition spoke of what he described as the unnecessary expenditure that was being made in government. The Minister of Finance (Mr. Abbott) described in his budget speech what was being done in that regard. Before passing to that, might I suggest that those who are filled with admiration for what is taking place elsewhere may perhaps be in the position to which the poet referred:

'Tis distance lends enchantment to the view,  
And robes the mountain in its azure hue.