

Price Control

and it is this government which tells the people what to do and when to do it, with no argument allowed.

So, Mr. Speaker, do we want democracy? Do we want people to have what they wish in this country? Or do we want a controlled economy? There is no way to have controls without having policemen or police types enforcing them. Human beings are human beings. Everybody takes a little crack at evasion once in a while. If there are people who do not, then you really do not like them because they will not take a chance. And they do not get on as entrepreneurs. But if you have everybody watching everybody else, you wind up with a controlled, semi-police state. We don't want that, do we?

It is time we stopped talking about controls since we can control nobody but the poorest workingman. It is not the labourer in this country who has caused inflation. Inflation started outside Canada, and everybody ought to realize that. It arrived with a big jolt when the U.S. devalued her currency. We have never caught up since. Our currency is just following along luckily at about the same level, with the result that we are not very different from the United States. But we are more fortunate in certain things.

Some of the comments of opposition members with respect to inflation have been rather amusing. The Conservative leader says the fundamental need is to pursue a judicious fiscal and monetary policy. What does that mean? It doesn't really mean anything. The hon. member for Don Valley (Mr. Gillies) keeps reiterating the same thing. Neither one of them is saying anything. They are not committing themselves to a policy. Anybody could say what they are saying. I should remind the hon. member for Don Valley that before he came into this House he was against controls—and now, of course, he is for controls. This might indicate some political bias.

● (1620)

Mr. Paproski: He has been the light.

Mr. Railton: The question as I see it cannot be settled by any simplistic solution such as wage and price controls. We have done a great deal to help the poverty section with our social security system and its escalation. We do worry about the people who are not in the poverty section but are in the fixed income section, the retired people who will see the erosion of their savings because of the depreciation of our currency. At the present time this really cannot be helped; let us say that honestly.

I think it is time we realized that good times are coming—in about a year. I think the price of oil will come down and there will be a reduction in many prices because the world is becoming more stable. I believe the settlement of the big strike in Britain was one of the factors. It is too bad the Tory government there was not smart enough to realize that by paying the miners a fair rate they would keep the wheels of industry turning, and although it might cost a little more, they would be tides over for about five years until the oil wells in the North Sea started producing. It rather demonstrates to me that Conservatives throughout the world are shortsighted.

Mr. Ed Nelson (Burnaby-Seymour): Mr. Speaker, when I go home tomorrow I will be able to report to my family

that there was a hush in the House as I rose to speak. I will not tell them how many people were here. For many of the members of this House and for millions of people in Canada there is a feeling of helplessness and frustration as they watch the cost of living rise day by day and month by month. The price of food has been rising steadily over the months and the people of my area in particular have been hit hard. According to a regular survey carried out by food price editors across the country on February 1, Vancouver still had the doubtful distinction of being the city where people pay the highest price for food.

The price of food went up more in the last two months than it did in the last 25 years. During the past year food prices have shot up by 13 per cent. Potatoes have gone up, according to Statistics Canada, 94.9 per cent; eggs, 46.3 per cent; chicken, 40.1 per cent; turkey, 35.9 per cent; and so the list goes on. But the winner was sugar. It went up by more than double in less than a year, and of course when the price of sugar goes up so do the items for which sugar is an essential component.

We know why sugar went up so drastically, do we not? The answer is in Statistics Canada, but it is also in the courts of our land. The three largest sugar importers, Atlantic Sugar Refineries, Redpath Sugar and St. Lawrence Sugar, were convicted of price-fixing in 1963. What happened? They were told they were bad little companies and they had to pay a fine. More than that, they suffered the full impact of the majesty of the law and were served with a restraining order not to do it again. But they went on dipping into the Canadian consumer's pocket for eight more years. Now they are back in front of the courts again, charged with the same offence of price-fixing; and not only with conspiring to boost the price of sugar over the years to the tune of millions of dollars—\$125 million to be precise—but also with keeping other companies from going into the sugar business. What is going to happen to them this time? Another fine amounting virtually to a licence to go on stealing? Another slap on the wrist?

It is not only the sugar companies, Mr. Speaker; there is a long list of companies that have been convicted of similar offences or are in the process of being convicted. There is concrete evidence that the cement companies, if you will pardon a lousy pun, both in Vancouver and Toronto are involved. And here is a dandy! Price fixing charges have been laid against 74 of the best known general insurance companies operating in Canada relating to the sale of fire insurance in Nova Scotia. There is a list of similar incidents.

I asked the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) during the question period last Thursday if it would be possible to implement legislation to provide for lifting or suspending the business licence of any company convicted more than once of deliberate price-fixing. A naive question. I know that licences are issued provincially and that the federal jurisdiction relates only to the actual commission of crimes. Hon. members will remember that the Prime Minister suggested I write to the provinces concerned—me, the hon. member for Burnaby-Seymour, sitting against the velvet curtain on the very back bench over in the corner in his first term of office, should do what the government should have done long ago!

Mr. Reynolds: Hear, hear!