

Shearer gives examples of profiteering in grocery trade, says price inspection will continue

The Prime Minister, the Hon. Hugh Shearer, said yesterday that a statement earlier this week by the president of the Chamber of Commerce, Mr. Carlton Alexander, attempted to distort the Government's intention in the recent price control drive.

Mr. Shearer said that there was widespread evidence of profiteering by merchants and he listed examples which he said should satisfy Mr. Alexander and the directors of the Jamaica Chamber of Commerce of the justification for the stepped-up inspection drive by the Government's price inspectors.

He said that he had warned about exorbitant prices before and the Jamaica Chamber of Commerce had never joined in supporting him in this matter. He added that the price inspection campaign would continue.

Following is the text of the Prime Minister's statement:

"Other matters of graver national importance have prevented me from commenting before now on the statement made earlier this week by the president of the Jamaica Chamber of Commerce, Mr. Carlton Alexander, in connection with the Government's present anti-profiteering drive.

I am surprised at the president's attempt to distort the Government's intention in its price inspection campaign.

To suggest that my immediate reaction to the clamour of complaints at the high cost of living was to ascribe it to profiteering and that I followed this diagnosis with an intensification of price inspection, is merely a cloud of propaganda.

The president cannot deny

that there is evidence of high profiteering by members of the trade his association serves. As I pointed out recently, between December 1, 1967, when the current prices inspection drive started, and October 9, 1968, a total of 1,450 persons were warned for prosecution.

The president may be interested to know a few of the examples of the items which were found being sold above the controlled prices by some of the traders who have been charged.

Libby's Corned Beef (12 oz.) which is controlled at 5/3 per tin, was being sold at 6/- per tin. The 7 oz. brand of this same corned beef which is controlled at 3/9 per tin, was being sold at 4/6 per tin. Hellaby's 12 oz. tins of corned beef which are controlled at 4/3d per tin were being sold at 5/6d per tin. Triple J corned beef (12 oz.) which is

controlled at 4/- per tin, was being sold at 4/3 per tin. Sun Farm 12 oz. tins of corned beef which are controlled at 4/- per tin were being sold at 4/8d per tin. Three Bulls 12 oz. tins of corned beef which are controlled at 4/3d per tin were being sold at 5/- per tin.

Conner's 13 oz. tins of herring which are controlled at 2/- per tin, were being sold at 2/3d per tin. Eve 15 oz. tins of mackerel which are controlled at 2/5d per tin, were being sold at 2/9d per tin. The 7½ oz. King Fisher tins of mackerel which are controlled at 1/6d per tin were being sold at 2/- per tin. The 15 oz. tins of the King Fisher mackerel which are controlled at 2/5d per tin, were being sold at 2/9 per tin, and the Grace 15 oz. tins of mackerel which are controlled at

2/5d per tin were being sold at 3/9d per tin.

Codfish, controlled at 2/8½ per lb., was being sold at 3/- per lb. Matches, controlled at 1½ per box, were being sold in some instances at 2d per box. Irish potatoes which are controlled at 8½ per lb. were being sold at 1/- per lb.

Appleton Special Rum which is controlled at 8/7d per flask, was being sold at 12/6d per flask. Pickled mackerel which is controlled at 1/7½d per lb., was being sold at 2/4d per lb.

I could list many more such examples of profiteering by persons in the grocery trade, to satisfy Mr. Alexander and the directors of his chamber of the justification for the price inspection drive, if they so desire.

In the meanwhile, however, I would like to ask the president what action, if any, has the Ja-

maica Chamber of Commerce ever taken to police the trade. Surely this body owes it to its own image and integration to ensure that persons involved in the grocery trade cannot be blamed by the public or Government for contributing to the high cost of living. Surely businessmen selling goods at a price as much as 64% in one case higher than what they are controlled for, are examples of ruthless profiteers:

The fact is that price inspection is one obvious way, and one practical manner, to deal with and expose the sky-high profits being enjoyed by unscrupulous businessmen. But in addition, the Government is taking, and has been taking other positive steps.

The entire development programme being carried out by (Continued on Page 25)

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