

# A Word With You

A POLL was recently taken by Elmo Roper on this question: "Would you say that your family income has just about kept even with prices; or that it has kept a little ahead of, or has lagged behind, prices?" Of those polled, 48 per cent said their income has lagged behind prices; 38 per cent said income and prices were just about even; 4 per cent were not sure; and only 10 per cent said their income has kept ahead. (This last represented mostly upper-income groups.)

This presents quite a different picture from the statistics usually put forward which purport to show that income has kept ahead of prices. The man and his wife who are shelling out the dough for the things they want to buy ought to have at least as good an idea of what they're experiencing as the statistician in Washington juggling an unwieldy mass of figures, indexes and abstracts.

The "familiar facts of intelligent observation," as Henry George pointed out, usually serve as a more reliable guide in these matters than indigestible data that so often hinge on "which side do you want to prove?"

Unfortunately, however, though people may know what is happening to them they are less satisfactory on the question also asked by Mr. Roper, "what should be done if prices get way out of line with incomes?" Almost all the answers given called for some kind of control—price control, profit control, wage control, interest rate control.

Most people—even the younger generation—are dominated in their economic thinking by the shock of the Great Depression which has left an indelible impression. Almost any-

thing will be endured to avoid a repetition of that catastrophe. And almost anything has indeed been endured, including a gigantic armaments program, a network of controls, and an ever-rising burden of taxes. People are at last beginning to murmur about this, but they have not yet received a shocker equal to the impact of the depression, revealing what taxes and controls can do to them. When these burdens grow intolerable (as they always have, historically, once they are applied to solve economic problems), a future Roper opinion poll will show different results on controls!

Another indication of current economic thinking—which places too much emphasis on more and more gadgets and too little emphasis on a more balanced economic life—is seen in prophecies of the future mapped out by educational, industrial and governmental agencies. By 1975 or 2000 we will have achieved almost complete automation; population and production will soar; the housewife will press buttons for all her daily chores; etc. etc. But what kind of a government will we have? How high will taxes be? What kind of wealth distribution will be worked out? What kind of progress will we make toward international peace? Will there be no more privileged groups, no more labor strife, no more tyrants and racketeers? Let's get our heads together on questions like these!

Robert Clancy

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