

Ways Discussed To Check Run-Away Cost Of Living

By SAM DAWSON
NEW YORK (AP)—An assault is underway today on the cost of living which threatens to get out of hand.
The weapons being discussed at two top-level conferences in Washington: federal controls over wages and prices.
But some businessmen question whether attempts to freeze wages and prices will get at the real core of the inflation problem—the rapidly with which purchasing power is outstripping production of goods.
Many contend that wage-price

controls merely tend inflation underground and do not control it, and explodes into black markets—meaning worse shortages and higher prices.

Auto Makers Summoned
One of the two Washington conferences is on the general subject of controls, the other on the specific question of the price of automobiles.

Auto makers are summoned to discuss with officials of the economic stabilization agency the refusal of General Motors and Ford to take back the recently announced price hikes. Clearly in the air is the threat that if the auto companies won't "hold the price line," the government will roll back prices for them. Criticism of the price hikes is tied to the record earnings the companies have been reporting.

This making "a guinea pig for price cutbacks" out of the auto industry is sharply criticized by young Henry Ford, who wants instead a general program applied equally to all industries, if any controls are necessary at all.

Discuss Emergency
At the general level, the President is discussing with congressional leaders the proclaiming of a national emergency, as a preliminary to wage and price controls, among other things.

This is a course widely urged of late by people with fixed incomes and those with semi-fixed incomes—such as most white-collar workers. They are pinched hardest as the cost of living climbs.
Some sort of wage-price control—whether general or selective—seems likely. Anticipation of them has been one of the chief factors back of the recent whirl of rising prices and wage scales.
But how general controls will be is another question.

Chrysler Corp. Keeps Customers Price Guessing

DETROIT (AP)—Chrysler Corp., again in step wage-wise with General Motors and Ford, kept its prospective customers guessing today whether it would fall in line price-wise.

If it does, it will put higher tags on its forthcoming 1951 model cars. Tuesday Chrysler passed out \$20,000,000—a year benefits to its 125,000 CIO and non-union employees. Auto industry sideliners speculated a price rise would follow.

Both GM and Ford boosted prices just a week ago. GM said its increases averaged "something less than five percent." Ford's was 5.7 percent. Both firms rejected a request by the government's economic stabilization agency to rescind the increases.

Chrysler's new models in its four lines will be introduced next month. Even before Tuesday's action, there had been widespread speculation that Chrysler would follow the GM and Ford lead. Most of the industry's so-called "independents" already had boosted prices on their 1951 models.

Chrysler rearranged its wage structure in a new five-year contract with the CIO United Auto Workers.

Adopting the cost-of-living wage control for the first time, Chrysler boosted its pay rates one cent an hour immediately and guaranteed an additional four cents each June 1 for the next four years.

It also raised maximum pension benefits from \$100-a-month now to \$125, including federal social security, by 1952; liberalized other pension and hospital insurance benefits; and granted a modified union shop.

A three-year contract signed last May after a bitter 100-day strike was extended to Aug. 31, 1953 without wage reopenings.

Except for the guaranteed raises, wages will rise or fall only as the cost of living goes up or down. A penny will be added or taken away each three months for each rise or fall of 1.14 points in the consumers' price index of the U. S. Bureau of Labor statistics.

This is the same system first adopted by General Motors in May, 1948, and renewed last May for five years. Ford switched over to an escalator pay arrangement last Labor day in a five-year agreement. Economic sections of the three contracts are virtually identical.

Chrysler voluntarily upped wages a flat ten cents an hour in August. But GM gave out four cents in May and has added eight cents in two adjustments since then. Ford granted eight cents in September and three cents since then.

Chrysler and the UAW agreed it would take a penny now to bring the Chrysler workers abreast of those at the other two firms. The average wage at the "big three" companies now is estimated at \$17.8 an hour.

Conferences, all unannounced, started Dec. 1. Union ratification meetings will be held Sunday but little or no opposition is expected.

Some commodities have gone way out of line with the rest, and may be fair game for any rollback. Farmers, on the other hand, feel most of their products are pretty well protected by the law which says that ceilings must not be below parity or below prices prevailing between May 24 and June 24. Only cotton, cottonseed oil, wool, and some meats are above that legal limit. And only cotton and wool are far enough above to offer attractive targets for control.

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