

IX

PUBLIC MEETING ON THE HIGH COST
OF LIVING, FANEUIL HALL

DECEMBER 9, 1916

THE great aim of American institutions is the protection of the individual. That is the principle which lies at the foundation of Anglo-Saxon liberty. It matters not with what power the individual is assailed, nor whether that power is represented by wealth or place or numbers; against it the humblest American citizen has the right to the protection of his Government by every force that Government can command.

This right would be but half expressed if it ran only to a remedy after a wrong is inflicted; it should and does run to the prevention of a wrong which is threatened. We find our citizens, to-day, not so much suffering from the high cost of living, though that is grievous enough, as threatened with

an increasing cost which will bring suffering and misery to a large body of our inhabitants. So we come here not only to discuss providing a remedy for what is now existing, but some protection to ward off what is threatening to be a worse calamity. We shall utterly fail of our purpose to provide relief unless we look at things as they are. It is useless to indulge in indiscriminate abuse. We must not confuse the innocent with the guilty; it must be our object to allay suspicion, not to create it. The great body of our tradespeople are honest and conscientious, anxious to serve their customers for a fair return for their service. We want their coöperation in our pursuit of facts; we want to coöperate with them in proposing and securing a remedy. We do not deny the existence of economic laws, nor the right to profit by a change of conditions.

But we do claim the right and duty of the Government to investigate and punish

any artificial creation of high prices by means of illegal monopolies or restraints of trade. And above all, we claim the right of publicity. That is a remedy with an arm longer and stronger than that of the law. Let us know what is going on and the remedy will provide itself. In working along this line we shall have great help from the newspapers. The American people are prepared to meet any reasonable burden; they are not asking for charity or favor; fair prices and fair profits they will gladly pay; but they demand information that they are fair, and an immediate reduction if they are not.

The Commonwealth has just provided money for an investigation by a competent commission. Its Police Department, its Law Department, are also at the service of our citizens. Let us refrain from suspicion; let us refrain from all indiscriminate blame; but let us present at once to the proper authorities all facts and all evidence

of unfair practices. Let all our merchants, of whatever degree, assist in this work for the public good and let the individual see and feel that all his rights are protected by his Government.