

Day's Events in Freeze

Following are developments yesterday affecting consumers and wage-earners under the 90-day wage and price freeze:

Automobile sales—American Motors announced that it would begin immediately to refund the 7 per cent Federal excise tax on cars sold since Sunday. Chrysler Corporation joined the others in the "big three" manufacturers in announcing that it would retain 1971 prices on its 1972 models during the 90 days.

Insurance policy renewals—A spokesman for the insurance Information Institute said that all filings for state approval of rate increases had been suspended. But he maintained that higher rates could be charged where they had already been approved.

Steel—The Bethlehem Steel Corporation said it would continue to invoice at the higher prices that became effective Aug. 5 on slightly more than half of the industry's product line. The corporation said it regarded planned increases for tin mill products and tool steel as frozen. The United States Steel Corporation said it would also hold to the higher prices.

Foreign imports—The Sony Corporation announced that its American subsidiary would increase its selling price on some products as soon as possible to compensate for the 10 per cent import surcharge. The Nissin Motor Company, maker of Datsun cars, said it would stick to a 5 per cent raise on its exports to the United States in face of the surcharge.

Utilities—The Public Service Commission of New York said no increases in utility rates would be permitted without Federal approval.

Food products—Lever Brothers Company canceled price increases on three of its products: Good Luck Margarine, Mrs. Butterworth's Syrup and Spry shortening products.

Storekeepers Here Uncertain How to Show Price Records

By LAURIE JOHNSTON

Many retailers and restaurateurs yesterday were puzzling over the part of the wage-price freeze order requiring them to make available for public inspection "a record" of their highest prices during the 30 days before the wage-price freeze, as President Nixon's order requires.

From Macy's and the A. & P. to small shopkeepers, the word most often used was "mystified," although some recalled posting similar price ceilings in World War II.

In an informal survey of a dozen stores, a request to see records of the peak prices met with blank looks and total incomprehension on the part of sales personnel. A clerk in a candy department said, "What are you talking about? What price freeze?"

The retailers questioned all said that they had had no such requests from their customers but that many customers—particularly in food stores and neighborhood shops—had asked the storekeeper whether they thought the price freeze would work.

Food chain executives noted that each market is supplied with a price book that is updated, weekly or monthly, to reflect changes in wholesale prices. This could be theoretically "available on demand."

But a consumer would find this book difficult to read since it covers from 10,000 up to 30,000 items in the larger stores and might run to 250 computerized pages.

"I'd hate to try to make any store manager thumb through that book with the customers," said Howard Schneider, secretary of Supermarkets of Manhattan and the Bronx. "Let's be realistic. He wouldn't have time for anything else, and his salary ought to be paid by the government—or the customers."

Restaurant managers also

were confused about how to comply with the freeze but they were not particularly concerned about it.

"When Washington tells us what to do, we'll do it," manager after manager said in effect.

"There's no question that the industry will comply, just as it did during price control," said Ben Emden, executive vice-president of the Restaurant League of New York. The League includes in its membership 120 of the better service restaurants in Manhattan.

"But," said Mr. Emden, "right now we're trying to find out what the government wants us to do."

Jerry Berns of the management of the Twenty One Club, 21 West 52d Street said he was waiting for Mr. Emden to send out a bulletin telling him what to do.

"Our menu changes every day but our over-all price list changes only on few and far between occasions," Mr. Berns said. "The better restaurants should have no trouble living with a 90-day freeze."

"But there are problems. We're expecting some wines in, and some whisky. Right now I wouldn't know how to price them. We'll just hold tight until we get some specifics."

2 Agencies Are Ready To Handle Questions

The city's Department of Consumer Affairs, as well as the Federal Government's Office of Emergency Preparedness, is ready to help those with questions or complaints about the President's wage and price freeze.

The telephone number in New York for the Federal agency is (212) 466-8450, and the Department of Consumer Affairs can be reached at (212) 964-7777.

8-19-71

NYT