

WASHINGTON (AP) — The government had good holiday news for Americans on Tuesday, reporting a moderate rise in inflation in November and the biggest monthly gain in workers' buying power in 18 months.

It said consumer prices increased three-tenths of one per cent, the same as in October. Grocery prices and other food costs declined for the first time since March. Interest rates on home mortgages also fell.

Workers benefitted from an increase of eight-tenths of one per cent in the purchasing power of their paychecks in November, although it still only raised their real earnings to the level of a year ago, the Labor Department said.

The favorable price report was especially welcome to the incoming Carter administration, which is counting on a moderate inflation rate next year to make it easier to initiate some of its economic and social programs.

Prices for the first 11 months of 1976 now have increased 4.5 per cent. If December prices maintain the same trend, the increase for the year could be under 5 per cent, well within the Ford administration's goal for the year.

The Labor Department said its Consumer Price Index in November stood at 173.8 of the 1967 average of 100, meaning that consumers paid about \$173.80 on the average for goods which cost \$100 nine

years earlier. | _ ;

The rate of increase in inflation in Oc-

tober and November would result in an

overall rate of slightly more than 3.6 per cent, if maintained for a full year.

However, most economists believe the underlying inflation rate in the economy remains stuck at between 5 and 6 per cent.

Food prices, which are volatile, can cause this rate to fluctuate up or down from month-to-month.

The biggest gains for consumers in November were in food prices, which were down two-tenths of one per cent. There were sharply lower prices for fresh vegetables and pork, and the cost of dairy

products declined for the first time since early in the year.

Partially offsetting these declines were a 2.2 per cent hike in beef prices and another big jump in the cost of coffee, which has risen about 50 per cent in the past 12 months. -

Prices of commodities other than food rose four-tenths of one per cent in November, the same as in October, with higher costs of clothing accounting for about one-third of the rise. Tobacco prices also were sharply higher.