

*The Address—Mr. Whelan*

foods. That, my hon. colleagues, is less of a monopoly than any one of a hundred labour unions that exist in any part of Canada today. Look at the PCV licences given to trucking organizations, the licences given to radio stations and the other things that exist in our nation today which operate under federal and provincial legislation. Are we going to ask farmers to accept less freedom and fewer rights than we are willing to grant to other citizens in this country?

There are those who will argue that food is an essential item in our economy and that farmers cannot be given the same rights and freedoms as labour unions. As a former member of a labour union, I just do not understand that. But there are tens of thousands of unionized Canadian workers who are involved in the Canadian food system, and if they do not do their jobs they can disrupt our food supply every bit as much as production decisions made by our farmers; and their impact on our food economy can be much more abrupt and much more disruptive. The west coast grain handlers' strike and the Great Lakes shipping strike mean that billions and billions of pounds of food will never get to the starving people of the world. They will never catch up with deliveries, no matter what anyone says, especially as we are not far from the freeze-up of the Great Lakes.

I do not advocate an end to workers' rights to strike and to bargain for better wages and working conditions. But I do argue that it is irresponsible and unfair to grant rights and privileges to one group of society that we deny to other groups in our society and economy.

Canada's farmers are among the most efficient, most productive and the hardest working people in our society. I think they deserve at least an even break to achieve a decent standard of living. That is what the movement to establish national marketing agencies for eggs, turkeys and broilers is all about. Yes, mistakes have been made. But what segment of society can claim that it has never made a mistake? What member of this House can claim he has never made a mistake? And some of the mistakes made have been far more costly to our economy than the errors of CEMA. What about oil spills, for example? Why should we demand that egg producers give up their right to control the production and marketing of their product?

I could be persuaded to really dig in my heels and fight every inch of the way to defend the egg producers' rights to run CEMA just the way that many other groups in our society have the right to run their own affairs. I have never suggested that farmers hold their products from the markets, Mr. Speaker. These people get into trouble because they are overproductive, and for no other reason. History shows that in 1971 they were getting 12 cents a dozen for their eggs at the grading station, but consumption did not go up in 1971. The then minister of agriculture paid \$2,300,000 to farmers to kill hens in order to take them out of production because they could not find storage or markets or put them into aid programs.

However, I understand the importance consumers place on a continuing supply of top quality food at reasonable prices, so I have agreed to a full inquiry into the egg industry. Also, I have taken action that has limited the price producers can charge for eggs, particularly with respect to imports. But I do not intend to sell our egg

[Mr. Whelan.]

industry down the river or to deny egg producers the fundamental and basic right to establish an orderly system of production and marketing for their commodity, if they want to exercise that right within the boundaries set out in the legislation approved by parliament.

Some people seem to be afraid that farmers will abuse their rights if they gain control over the production and marketing of their commodities. But let us look at the record for the egg industry. Egg prices in Canada averaged 84.6 cents a dozen at Toronto last January, while prices in New York were over \$1.00 a dozen. Prices at Toronto averaged below New York prices for January, February, March, August and September. It is precisely because prices in the United States dropped in late spring and summer that they face the bankruptcies, production cuts and upcoming shortages which I mentioned earlier—no planning, no stability, nothing for their producers.

Egg producers have increased their productivity and efficiency much faster than society as a whole. As a result, the average worker in Canada today can buy 4.8 dozen eggs with one hour's pay, compared with 4.4 dozen in 1969, 3.4 dozen in 1966, 2.4 dozen in 1956 and 1.6 dozen in 1950. If the price of all other products had inflated by as little as the price of eggs, there would be no such thing as inflation in Canada today. Egg prices have remained low, mainly because egg producers have increased their productivity.

● (1650)

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Penner):** Order, please. I regret having to interrupt the hon. minister, but his allotted time has expired. He may continue only if he has the unanimous consent of the House. Is there unanimous consent?

**Some hon. Members:** Agreed.

**Mr. Whelan:** I thank hon. members of the House for their courtesy, and will try to finish as quickly as possible. The record for eggs during the existence of CEMA has been better than the over-all record of the total consumer price index or the index for all foods. The consumer price index rose from 139.8 in 1972 to 150.4 in 1973. The index for all foods went up from 141.4 in 1972 to 162 in 1973. But when we look at eggs, we see that the index in 1973 stood much lower, at 136.5. It was only 22.6 points higher than in 1966, and only 27.2 higher than in 1949.

Anyone who says that the high price of eggs is the real culprit in the food basket is not being factual. I challenge the critics of the orderly marketing of our eggs to point to any other sector of our economy which has been able to hold the line so well between 1949 and 1973. As I say, the line has been held precisely because egg producers have improved their productivity. They have introduced scientific ways of taking care of chickens. As a result, production has increased and mortality reduced to practically nil. Research in the field over the years has led to a fantastic increase in the production of this high-protein food. We have come to expect such productivity increases in agriculture. That is partly the reason so many farmers have been put out of business.

Let me turn now to the selected leaks from the Forbes report. Nobody can get that report. At least, I cannot get a