

Customs Tariff

worry about the lack of speed in respect of agricultural matters at this time. These things can and will be done.

Under this new minister most of those things that have to be known to keep the agricultural industry out of trouble are known very quickly. Most of these things are known two or three weeks before the trouble develops. Under the previous administration we had great difficulty in getting things done. I should not say that we never got tariffs imposed, because I remember shortly after coming here the hon. member for Essex-Windsor did impose a surcharge on cherries. I think he was able to do that because other members of cabinet did not realize or understand what was going on. As soon as they did, that was the end of it, and we did not see another rapid imposition of a surcharge to provide the protection needed.

Under the previous administration we thought we were going to see a formula developed. We had hopes that the former minister would be able to sell that formula to his cabinet colleagues. He was unsuccessful because five years or six years later we still did not have a formula. We have such a formula today, and I am quite proud to note its existence. This is a formula that can and will be workable.

Mr. Whelan: You know it is a halfway measure.

Mr. Whittaker: The former minister says it is a halfway measure. He did not bring in anything so we did not have any measure at all. I do not believe this is a halfway measure. That hon. member can sit there and say those kinds of things, but let us wait and see how this works. When we see it work we will realize it is not a halfway measure. I think it is going to work, and the former minister of agriculture, the hon. member for Essex-Windsor—

An hon. Member: He will be the minister again next week.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Whittaker: If he is going to be the minister again next week, God help the country. That hon. member keeps patting himself on the back, and he did so while watching the producers and the canners in this country go down, down and down. I have in mind the tomato industry in southern Ontario, which is now in a really sad situation.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I think the hon. member for Okanagan North (Mr. Whittaker) should be allowed to make his speech without constant interference by other members in this chamber.

An hon. Member: They just do not like to hear the truth.

Mr. Whittaker: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I was coming to the end of my remarks at any rate. The catcalls from the other side sort of worked me up. At any rate, I am sure that the industry will be pleased to see this bill passed. It should have been in place for last year's crop. Some products did receive the protection required through an order in council by our government. Some products did not receive the protec-

tion needed. When we pass this bill it will go a long way toward helping the agricultural industry in this country but, as I said before, it does not appear to me to provide the protection in Canada that other countries have in respect of agriculture.

Mr. Ray Chenier (Timmins-Chapleau): Mr. Speaker, the tariff board and the horticultural industry recommended that an automatic surtax be applied to imports of horticultural products as the produce crossed the border when the price fell below a "trigger" price based on an average of the previous three-year f.o.b. import price.

The present proposal is not automatic and is not what was requested by the industry or the tariff board, and the news release of October 22 is erroneous and misleading.

The improved faster system is unlikely to be any different from the present system, for the following reasons. There is a time delay between the produce crossing the border and the industry authorities verifying the information to bring to Agriculture Canada's attention, resulting in a probable delay of several days. The imports are usually made in summer months when cabinet ministers are frequently on holidays or absent from the office and cannot take the fast and effective action necessary. Officials of both departments need time to consult and go over the information, and this will result in more delays. This type of procedure requires notifying the exporting country, and consultation prior to the surtax being put in place, with more delay.

It is common knowledge that the three-year average proposed as the trigger price base did not take into account the inflation rate, and the 85 per cent of the three-year average is unlikely to be of much help under present economic conditions.

Since the season for crops like sweet cherries, etc., is very short, about three to four weeks at most, and injury can occur within a few days and a few shipments, the proposed system will not be of any real value because it is not automatic. The season will be over and the injury will have occurred before any action will have been taken. For commodities not named, the 20 days to make a decision is completely unworkable. The opposition among the two departments from a bureaucratic standpoint is well known, and since there is nothing new in the proposals to overcome this opposition, these time delays will be long. I cannot see that this proposal will be any different from the present procedure.

Miss Aileen Nicholson (Trinity): Mr. Speaker, this bill will implement the ways and means motions relating to the customs tariff which were tabled by the former minister of finance in the last Parliament on October 23, 1978. Essentially it removes the tariffs on imported fruits and vegetables at certain times of the year and reinstates them during our growing seasons when domestic produce is available. It helps the consumer at times when food is scarce and expensive, and it protects our producers at other times.

Unfortunately the new government did not see fit to recall Parliament in June to deal with these matters. In the situation in which we find ourselves now, it becomes clear that this bill and other measures are needed more than ever.