

Inquiries of the Ministry

Hon. J. J. Greene (Minister of Agriculture): Mr. Speaker, a detailed answer to such a question can hardly be made during orders of the day. Generally speaking, though, we envisage that there will be a more difficult competitive position for Canadian producers with regard to the more highly processed and finished products of agriculture by reason of the greater competition from other countries, such as Denmark and New Zealand, which have also devalued their currency, as well as from the greater production which no doubt will take place in the United Kingdom.

With respect to most raw agricultural products we anticipate at the present time that there will be no great effect on Canadian exports. With respect to wheat, inasmuch as no other exporting country of hard wheat has devalued its currency I should not think our competitive position will be hurt. Nevertheless, there will be greater productivity of soft wheat in the United Kingdom and quite possibly there will be greater use of soft wheat than now is the case.

Mr. Stanfield: A supplementary question, Mr. Speaker. Does the minister contemplate taking any action with regard to agricultural products that he considers it probable will be adversely affected?

Mr. Greene: At the present time, Mr. Speaker, my department is studying the situation and attempting to keep abreast of it. If it appears that the Canadian producer will be badly affected in any area we shall embark on negotiations with the British to see if the position may be alleviated.

Mr. W. B. Nesbitt (Oxford): A supplementary question, Mr. Speaker. Since the minister gave the Leader of the Opposition such a refreshing answer, and since producers of tobacco, cheese, apples and the like are greatly concerned about what is happening, could the minister make a statement next week on motions and deal with a number of specific products such as those I have already mentioned in order to allay the apprehension of many producers in the country?

Mr. Greene: I shall be glad to consider the hon. member's suggestion. With respect to fresh fruits and apples generally, the present value of exports is approximately \$6 million and we do not contemplate any great change in this regard. With respect to dairy products, and cheese in particular, where exports are \$14 million, it is in this area that we shall face the greatest difficulty. Though no product specifically competes with our old

[Mr. Stanfield.]

Canadian cheddar cheese, which is our main export—

An hon. Member: It is the best in the world.

Mr. Greene: It is the best in the world; that is quite correct. Though New Zealand cheese is not of the same brand as old Canadian cheddar cheese, if it is cheaper it will offer us stiffer competition in the U.K. market. Cheese is one area where difficulty is contemplated.

Mr. Nesbitt: Since the minister was able to give the house invaluable information about some products, can he comment about tobacco? Tobacco is of great concern and interest to some.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. Greene: The same remarks—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member's original question was to ask the minister to make a statement on motions. I suggest to the hon. member and the minister that the statement should not be made now.

Hon. D. S. Harkness (Calgary North): I wish to direct a question to the Acting Prime Minister. Was the Minister of Trade and Commerce expressing government policy when in a speech to the GATT in Geneva he is reported as proposing a positive program to reduce obstacles to trade in agricultural products, such as farm subsidies and support prices, which I take it means the reduction or elimination of subsidies and support prices for agricultural products?

Hon. Paul Martin (Acting Prime Minister): As the hon. gentleman knows, in order to understand sentences contained in a public statement it is always well to have the context; and since I have not seen the whole speech I would prefer to read the speech in question in its entirety and then confer with the hon. gentleman.

Mr. Harkness: Then is it government policy to reduce or eliminate farm subsidies and support prices?

Mr. Martin (Essex East): What the government's policy is with regard to this particular matter will have to be analysed in the light of that statement as a whole; and I have not read that statement.