

*Cost of Living*

went on to say there would be occasional surpluses in agricultural production, but that scientific preservation of food and new processes which had been introduced made it possible for mankind to preserve those surpluses for distribution when and where required. If you will produce it, said the minister of that day, the private marketing forces of Canada can sell it, and if they cannot, the government will come to their aid. We were looking at a long-term requirement.

I might say, Mr. Speaker, that this speech was delivered in a constituency part of which is now the constituency of Madawaska-Victoria. During the last ten years agricultural production in that area has dropped almost 20 per cent under the administration of the government. I might say, also, that the hon. member for Madawaska-Victoria (Mr. Corbin) was not elected to this House in 1972 on the basis of the agricultural policies of the present government.

There has been a very distinct change in the policies of government during the ten years I have mentioned. In 1971 the minister of agriculture addressed the Canadian Horticultural Council at its winter meeting. He said at that time that the government of the day stood for cheap food. He also told the farmers that if they could not exist in the face of world competition as the cheapest source of supply of any given food demanded by Canadians, they would have to suffer the economic consequences. If you cannot become efficient enough to compete, he told the farmers, then you shall go broke.

This was in contrast with the policy of the Conservative Party which recognized that Canadians were dependent, first, upon a local supply of food and, second, upon the importation of food. They designed a structure for the protection of the Canadian producer containing a flexible duty set-up against the influx of dumping of food by any means by any country where there was a surplus. In contrast to this, when food arrived from foreign countries in competition with the Niagara peninsula and was dumped at disastrous prices, no dumping duty was imposed.

What happened? Peach farmers did not set out additional peach trees. Production declined. When apple juice was dumped on this continent, with Canada as the gateway to the southern markets of the U.S., no dumping duty was imposed though no country in the world could produce apple juice at the price at which it arrived. It had to be dumped; it had to be subsidized shipment because it scarcely covered the cost of freight, let alone the cost of production. But apple producers were not compensated under any program of government. They were told, instead, "We have a cheap food policy; you suffer it out, boys." So the producers did not plant more trees. They did not renew their orchards. The decline in apple production will become more evident as the years go on as a result of the neglect of that situation.

When the potato industry found itself in world competition, in pursuance of which governments around the world subsidized the shipment of potatoes to traditionally Canadian markets, the minister of agriculture said, "I'm sorry. We can't help you. We can't take your surpluses off the market because it might cost the consumers a few dollars. We might take off too many and the price might go up." Well, Mr. Speaker, the production of potatoes went

[Mr. McCain.]

down again by almost 10 per cent from 1971 to 1972 and it would have been much cheaper for the consumer to have had the production of 1971 to market through the 1972-73 season. This is economic mismanagement in the most unforgivable fashion because it abuses every man who works on the farm and every consumer who eats a bite of food. Across the board, it has been a most short-sighted policy.

If the government had taken a look at the graphs in respect to farm income, it would have found that it was declining at just about the pitch of Niagara Falls. If the government had taken a look at the cost of input of agricultural requirements, it would have seen an incline similar to that of Mount Everest. And as the net income of farmers declined, the exodus from the farms began to accelerate with the aid of the task force on agriculture. This was the task force which recommended the removal of two-thirds of the farms in agriculture today, to be completed by 1980.

Tell that to the consumers, because that is the very policy which also contributed to the shortage of food. That is part of the policy which contributed to the shortage of potatoes in Canada in the middle of May, though the supply would ordinarily have lasted into July. Do you think, Mr. Speaker, that anybody in the House should vote for economic idiocy and blindness of this nature? As production declined, prices were bound to rise as supplies also declined.

● (2140)

Instead of having ARDA—and I use this as a comparison—we had the imposition of a plan upon the Canadian farmers which retired land from agriculture in a mandatory fashion. They either bought land and retired it from agriculture, or they rented it and put it out of production in agriculture, a combination which could not help but eventually arrive at the store counter where the consumer would suffer as the farmer had suffered.

The economic management was like a planned disaster. The capital position of the farmers declined almost annually for ten consecutive years under Liberal management. While part of that capital loss has been replaced in the last crop year, there are farmers who will be paying income tax on the money they pay for mortgages for the next 20 years to come as a result of the financial mismanagement of this government.

I say to those to our extreme left, many of whom come from agricultural areas, that if they vote in support of this government's economic management in agriculture, if they vote in support of this government's consumer prices, then their vote is diametrically opposed to all of the principles they have ever enunciated.

There is a reptile, I am told, which sheds its skin on an annual basis and then turns around and swallows it so as to leave behind no trace of its presence. It could very well be that the only trace of the party to our left, if it continues to move in its devious ways, may be the echoes which may still be vibrating through the canyons of this country.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!