

Supply—Agriculture

Columbia fruit growers this year. I would not confine it to British Columbia growers. If Nova Scotia, Ontario, or some other province is in the same sort of fix, it should be extended to them.

All I ask is that all agricultural sections of our country be treated alike and be given access to some funds under this particular act.

Mr. Nesbitt: Mr. Chairman, I was very interested in the fact that the minister suggested that the subject I had in mind, namely cheese, should be dealt with under this particular item of the estimates which has to do with agricultural prices support. I could not help wondering whether perhaps there was a hint from the minister that maybe we were going to have a higher floor price under cheese, or something of that nature.

Mr. Gardiner: There is now.

Mr. Nesbitt: A higher floor price for cheese?

Mr. Gardiner: There is a floor price.

Mr. Nesbitt: What I had in mind was the saving of the time of the committee in the passing of the estimates. I thought I might avoid repeating what I had already said. To refer back briefly to get the context of what I have in mind, on January 10, 1955, in reply to a question asked by the hon. member for Middlesex East, the Minister of Trade and Commerce referred to the fact that there had been a verbal agreement with New Zealand in regard to the importation of cheese, but this had been discontinued; it was no longer in effect. I realize, of course, Mr. Chairman, I cannot refer specifically to a previous verbatim discussion during this session, but on February 7, 1956, a question was asked by myself concerning cheese. The question will be found at page 915 of *Hansard* of 1956. It reads as follows:

I should like to direct a question to the Minister of Trade and Commerce. It has to do with a question I asked the minister about 10 days ago. Has the minister any information yet with respect to whether there are likely to be any imports of New Zealand cheddar cheese into Canada within the next six months?

The minister of Trade and Commerce replied:

I made inquiries at the office of the high commissioner of the government of New Zealand, and he knows of no shipments coming this way.

Some other remarks were added by the minister which have no particular relevance. Later on, as the result of a supplementary

[Mr. Jones.]

question by the hon. member for Hastings-Frontenac, the Minister of Trade and Commerce replied:

There is no permit required, but there is a customs duty on cheese, and the port record would show if there were an importation of cheese by ship. No permit is required. Anyone can import cheese who cares to pay the duty.

Then on March 8 last, as the result of a question asked by the hon. member for Brandon-Souris, the Minister of Agriculture informed us, as reported at page 2008 of *Hansard* of this year, that there was a general understanding with regard to the importation of cheese either from New Zealand or from Australia which has been lived up to. He also said this agreement continues. Farther along on the same page the Minister of Agriculture replied to a question of mine and said that this verbal agreement—I think it was referred to as a gentleman's agreement—had been going on for some time.

This question of bringing cheese into Canada from New Zealand or elsewhere has been obscured by a lot of information, rumour and suggestion. I know that on one occasion the hon. member for Hastings-Frontenac made a speech pointing out how imports of cheese could come under the Export and Import Permits Act. The Minister of Trade and Commerce has informed us on two occasions in the last two years that there was no restriction whatsoever on cheese coming into the country from Australia and New Zealand. He said there was a verbal agreement with New Zealand in the past, but it had been discarded that year. The Minister of Agriculture tells us that there is an agreement with New Zealand with respect to the importation of cheese, and as a result I for one am very confused as to just what is the situation.

I was wondering whether the minister could clear it up now once and for all. Just what is the situation regarding the importation of cheese from New Zealand, Australia or elsewhere? In other words, Mr. Chairman, can the minister tell us just who is right? The Minister of Trade and Commerce has told us on two different occasions that nothing would prevent cheese from coming into the country and that the verbal agreement had been discontinued. Was the Minister of Agriculture correct when he told us only a few days ago that there is a gentleman's agreement with the government of New Zealand that had been in effect for some years? To get this cleared up I think a great many members in this house and the people who are producing cheese and other dairy products would like to get the matter straight. Can the minister tell us what is the situation?