

Oral Questions

That, nevertheless, has left, as I indicated to the hon. member for Yukon, a residual discretion with the Chair that it is still possible for the Chair to determine, on any given day, that a question of privilege during the question period is so important and so fundamental that the question period, or no other proceedings, can really take place unless that matter has been set aside. In the light of that, I dealt with this matter which I thought was of a very fundamental importance today, and I hope hon. members will agree, whatever their disposition in terms of support was for the motion which ultimately arose, that it was a point that had to be taken up at once because it was of such a fundamental nature.

I do see a certain inconsistency. Having the ability to rely on a daily basis on this improvement in our practice which has purged the question period of these matters of privilege, or at least deferred them to three o'clock for the benefit of all members, I do see a certain inconsistency on a daily basis in the Chair relying on that, and the House relying on that, and then one day getting in difficulty and taking up a point that had to be dealt with and thereby depriving the House of the balance of the question period. Perhaps in not carrying on for the last five minutes of the question period I was being a bit precipitous in tying the two points together. However, in the circumstances, giving the House the benefit of the doubt, I think we ought to separate the two questions entirely and recognize that there were about five minutes remaining in the question period.

I do not believe, if my memory serves me correctly, that I had as yet recognized a second speaker in the New Democratic Party. I will do so, and he will be followed by a new speaker from the Conservative party.

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CONSUMER AFFAIRS**COST OF FOOD IMPORTS**

Mr. Lorne Nystrom (Yorkton-Melville): Mr. Speaker, I choose my words to the Minister of Agriculture carefully. Perhaps I can switch for a minute to the consumer price index without insulting the hon. gentleman. I see from statistics which came out this morning that the increase in the price of food this year over last year amounted to about 14.7 per cent. The minister expressed the view on May 2 that much of the reason for this was too great a reliance upon food imports. Since about 70 per cent of these imports could be produced here I should like to ask the hon. gentleman whether he is prepared to introduce a national program to promote self-sufficiency in food in this country.

Hon. E. F. Whelan (Minister of Agriculture): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member says much of these products can be produced here. There is no doubt about it considering the growing season and the climatic conditions. But fresh leaf vegetables account for 31.6 per cent of this increase in one month.

If the hon. member would describe a way of growing these things in snowbanks, I would be glad to listen to him.

[Mr. Speaker.]

● (1552)

But if we want to have those products, we will have to import them. It is our desire to increase production of those products which we have the ability to produce in the most efficient manner, and our discussions with our trading partners in Geneva are conducted with that aim in view.

Mr. Nystrom: Mr. Speaker, I am talking about a lot of products other than just lettuce. I am talking about beef, poultry, many fruits and vegetables, and also cheese, much of which we could be producing in this country. Since last week the Department of Industry, Trade and Commerce announced a program of half a million dollars to promote the consumption of Canadian manufactured goods in the country, I should like to ask whether or not the minister will talk to his colleague and devise a similar program for the promotion of the production of food in our country, because if you take away grain and oilseeds, last year our deficit amounted to \$1.8 billion.

Mr. Whelan: I think that again the hon. member is forgetting that this is the nation called Canada, which does not mean that if you take away one thing from one sector of the country, you would not have it. We are one of the most fortunate nations in the world because we do have all those things, and we have a tremendous balance of trade in agricultural products of about \$800 million.

Mr. Nystrom: Mr. Speaker, I wonder if the minister is aware of the fact that we could be producing in Canada about 70 per cent of the foods we import from abroad, according to the figures from his own department, and that if we were producing them here in Canada we would be putting several hundred thousand more people to work. In light of those circumstances, would the minister consider at least setting up a task force to study the possibility of self-sufficiency in food in Canada?

Mr. Whelan: Mr. Speaker, we are doing just what the hon. member is talking about, we are considering this. Our whole trading program is designed to encourage production of those products which we produce in our country in an efficient manner. We should increase production of those and import only those products which we do not produce efficiently here. The hon. member refers to some of the products that we import. With regard to commercial beef, we have trading partners with whom we have traded for years from whom we buy beef which we do not produce in our country. Is the hon. member suggesting that we stop trading with them and break our Commonwealth ties and our agreements under GATT? If he is suggesting that, let him say so.