

Food Policy

The statements are also full of all kinds of beautiful platitudes about food production in this country. As has already been said, some of these platitudes are conflicting. The Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs, in his statement, speaks about a market system. The Minister of Agriculture refers to marketing boards and orderly marketing. There seem to be conflicting objectives. Perhaps the statement made by Walter Stewart in his book is quite relevant; he said "divide and con" is one of the objectives of this government's food policy. They are dividing the consumer and the farmer, and at the same time trying to con both of them.

This food policy statement, if it is such a thing, is based on the same old market system we have had for years. It does not analyse any of the problems of that old market system. It does not offer any changes at all. The minister may say that changes are made, but let me analyse some of the changes that the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs is suggesting today. He says, first of all that the government will provide regular price information to consumers on basic foods. What does he mean by that? If he were going to provide some price information on a store by store basis, then that might be helpful to consumers; but I am sure he will not do that.

Secondly, he says the government will strengthen food inspection services. What does he mean by that? Is he going to tackle some of the junk and artificial foods sold in this country? He does not say. Thirdly, he says the government will work with the provinces to develop national food inspection guidelines. For goodness sake, Mr. Speaker, I hope he does work with the provinces: What is so new about that? Fourthly, he says the government will strive to improve the productivity, efficiency and competitiveness of food production, processing, distribution and retailing. The government has said that, probably for the last 110 years. Fifthly, he says the government will ensure that all appointments to boards, agencies and other institutions will utilize widely experienced persons, and that there will be a balanced view. I hope the government is already doing this. I hope that not all the people appointed to these boards are defeated Liberal candidates, and that some of them do have balanced views.

The final point the minister makes is that the government is going to give increased emphasis to food safety and good nutrition, both federally and in collaboration with provincial governments. Again, Mr. Speaker, that is a nice platitude; but what is the government going to do about it? All governments in this country last year spent about \$1 million on nutrition information and education, while the private food chains spent about \$90 million on advertising their products. What is the government going to do in this area? Again, it does not say.

In the statement of the Minister of Agriculture these same types of platitudes are made, but he does not elaborate on any specific policy. For example, he says that we need an international stabilization scheme. The government has always said this. But what new action is being taken to stabilize food prices around the world? He is saying that the problems of the farmers can all be looked after by the Agricultural Stabilization Act and the Western Grain Stabilization Act, these great

[Mr. Nystrom.]

and wonderful programs which are in place and which will be maintained. He does not talk about improving them, despite the fact that gross farm incomes fell by 31 per cent in January, 1977, compared with January, 1976. Nothing new is being proposed in this regard. We know those programs are not fair or equitable and that they will not improve the incomes of farmers in this country.

The minister also talks about our trade policy and says it must be reassessed. How is he going to reassess this policy? What new things is he going to propose? What is he going to do about tariffs? The average tariff on farm goods in this country is less than one-half of 1 per cent, and the average manufacturing tariff is something like 20 per cent or more. What is he going to do in this area? Everything he is talking about in this food policy is really a bunch of platitudes and generalizations. It is a "nothing" statement, with nothing new in it.

● (1250)

We have had about one year of speculation concerning a food strategy for our country. It was supposed to co-ordinate things in Canada and do something about the crisis which I think is imminent. We have had two ministers scrapping and fighting with each other for the last year. They have let us see some of the documents and the conflicting views. Now they have come up with a statement which is a compromise and a mish-mash of ideas. It is a document which is absolutely, totally irrelevant. It is a typical Liberal gimmick as we go into an election campaign.

In the meantime, there are a lot of things which should be done. As the hon. member for Ottawa-Carleton (Mrs. Pigott) mentioned, there is a problem of food availability in the world. How are we going to feed those people? We cannot feed them now. How are we going to feed them when I am on the old age pension? The ministers should turn their attention to that problem. They do not do anything about land use. The minister's own department talks about 250 acres a day of good farmland going out of production in Canada. There is no leadership by the federal government to preserve good land for the production of food. They do nothing about the availability of food in this country, despite the fact we are already a net importer of food in Canada, if you take away grains and oilseeds.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Nystrom: The Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs said that we will have no problem with the supply of food in the foreseeable future. We had a deficit last year of \$1.5 billion. If you look at the government's own statement on food strategy for the same year, you will see they indicate the deficit is \$1.9 billion. They cannot even get their figures straight. That is the situation we face in this country.

There is also the question of energy. The government did not talk about the impact of energy prices or the shortage of energy. That is important—its impact on the food strategy. The food sector uses about 15 per cent of the energy in this