

last February I have been hearing about berries. Hon. members in the house have heard the hon. member for Fraser Valley repeatedly ask whether a ceiling price would be set on berries.

My first criticism as a British Columbia member is that if a ceiling was to be placed on the price of berries, there is no reason why it should not have been done two months ago. In this instance there is a no D-day, and no element of surprise is necessary. The farmers were entitled to know two months ago what their prices would be. They should have known two months before the ceiling was put on. As my hon. friend has said, they would not have planted strawberries if they had known they were going to be given 12 cents a pint, in view of the fact that last year their basic cost was 12.52 cents. It would appear that when the ceiling price was set, it was not set on last year's price, but rather on prices from 1938 to 1942. It must be remembered that in that period of time the great bulk of berry farmers in British Columbia were Japanese. Japanese produced berries at prices at which no white man could ever attempt to produce them. They worked from dawn to dusk for ten and eleven cents an hour as their basic rate of pay. To-day the berry farmers of British Columbia—when they can get labour—must pay 65 cents an hour.

I do not think the people of British Columbia are objecting to price control, but they are objecting to our farmers being legislated into bankruptcy by the action of the wartime prices and trade board. There was no consultation with any of the berry-growing group in British Columbia. Certainly no British Columbia member was tipped off or asked in advance what he thought of these prices. These men of the prices board sit in their ivory tower down here, suddenly set a price and say, "You can like it or lump it." Well, we are not going to like it or lump it. The only way we can object to the action taken by this board is to move the adjournment of the house to discuss a matter of immediate national importance. This matter is of immediate national importance. We members sitting in this house are able thus to bring before the house particulars of an act committed by this board which is legislating into bankruptcy the strawberry growers of British Columbia.

Mr. THOMAS REID (New Westminster): Mr. Speaker, coming as I do from a district where there are a considerable number of strawberry growers I rise to join in the protests that have been made against the action taken by the wartime prices and trade board. I concur in what has been said by the two hon. members who have spoken. While to many

hon. members this matter may not seem to be one of national importance, I will point out that it affects the lives of many farmers. It would not have been brought before the house this afternoon had the representations made to the minister been given heed to, but there is no other way to bring this grievance before the house than to stop its proceedings and point out forcibly to the government and the country what has been described by hon. members as an iniquity.

I do not intend to go into the matter too deeply at the moment, but I think it is well known that the attitude of the wartime prices and trade board has not been one of helping the farmer or keeping him in business. Donald Gordon, the chairman, has stated emphatically right from the time he first took office that he did not care what it cost the producer, that all that he and his officials were interested in was the price set. In this instance information about the price has been deliberately withheld from the public until almost the eve of the crop coming on the market. The prices board now comes along and notifies the people of British Columbia and elsewhere what the prices will be.

Let me give one or two reasons why we are protesting. The other hon. members who have spoken have pointed out why strawberries have continued to be grown in British Columbia. Previously the strawberry patches were mostly in the hands of the Japanese, and that meant that the father, the wife and all the family down to the smallest tots were working long hours. They were thus able to keep up their strawberry production at prices which would have permitted very few men or women to exist at all. Many of these farms were taken over after the evacuation of the Japanese. Although prices were low, they kept going up a little as the war progressed, and until this year no price ceiling on strawberries was put in effect by the prices board. The prices obtained for strawberries last year were almost twice what will be received this year. Even with the prices being asked last year, I did not hear one complaint. Why? Early strawberries are generally looked upon as luxuries and the people bought them without any great complaint.

To my mind it would be far better if people were able to eat more fresh strawberries than to have them put up into jam with the use of pectin. I have my own views as to the kind of jam that is going on the market to-day. However, I do not intend to discuss the jam situation at this time; I shall deal only with strawberries. If this order is carried into effect it will mean that many strawberry growers will say that they cannot carry on, and