

would ask the minister for an explanation of these excessive costs in the maritime provinces and why these provinces are apparently discriminated against in comparison with the central provinces.

Mr. HANSON (York-Sunbury): I would support what my hon. friend has just said. I have not my files with me but I have had extensive correspondence with the officials of either the Department of Agriculture or some other department of government. I think there has been discrimination in some parts of the country in favour of cooperative societies as against ordinary consumers, on the theory that the cooperatives are able to buy a little cheaper and distribute the difference by way of dividends among their associates. That is the theory which was sold to me by somebody; I do not state it as a matter of fact. I should like to know exactly what the position is. The fact remains, as the hon. member for Cumberland has just stated, that costs of fertilizer in the maritimes are higher than in the central provinces. We are supplied, as the minister has stated, from the United States side of the line. I do not see why on principle there should be any difference in price, especially as the government is paying a subsidy so that, as I understand it, there may be support for these people, and equalization. Like the hon. member for Cumberland, I ask why there is a difference, perhaps more than fifty cents a ton—

Mr. BLACK (Cumberland): Up to a dollar and a half.

Mr. HANSON (York-Sunbury): —up to a dollar and a half as against certain parts of the country in comparison with the central provinces. It is the old story: down there we have to pay a little more for everything than is paid in the central provinces, and our people are just fed up with that condition. There may be a reason for it, I do not know; but the reasons which were given to me do not over-persuade me that there is justification for it. I should like to know what the justification is.

Mr. GARDINER: Well, Mr. Chairman, selling prices and price controls generally are not under this department.

Mr. HANSON (York-Sunbury): I realize that.

Mr. GARDINER: I understand there is a wholesalers' price which is established the same all the way across Canada, but for some reason which I am not able to explain—probably those who come from the maritimes can explain it—fifty cents greater profit is allowed

[Mr. P. C. Black.]

as between the wholesaler and the retailer in the maritime provinces than is permitted elsewhere.

Mr. HANSON (York-Sunbury): I do not know why that should be.

Mr. GARDINER: I am informed it has always existed, not only since the prices board took control, but before the board had anything to do with it. Apparently they simply acknowledged the business conditions which existed, which before control was taken, provided for the higher prices in the maritimes than exists elsewhere.

Mr. BLACK (Cumberland): Is it not a primary duty of government in a war measure such as this to protect the consumer?

Mr. GARDINER: Again I should not be speaking for the prices board. Some of us are occasionally very critical of them, but after all, what most of us have insisted upon is that they maintain the condition which was there in the four weeks over which the price level was taken and apply it for the period ahead. I assume that if business conditions in the maritime provinces necessitated that during that period of time and previously, it has been maintained down to the present.

Mr. BLACK (Cumberland): If it is the policy of the government to protect the wholesaler against the consumer, they should make a reduced price and pay the extra cost from the government's funds rather than impose additional cost on the consumer. If they intend to perpetuate this excessive charge against the consumer, the government should certainly pay the difference and not impose that additional cost upon the farmer and the user of the fertilizer in the maritime provinces, in contrast with what is done in central Canada.

Mr. HANSON (York-Sunbury): I realize that this matter does not come under the minister's department.

Mr. GARDINER: And for that reason it is not very fair to be discussing it now, when the minister in charge is not here.

Mr. HANSON (York-Sunbury): I am inclined to agree, and, knowing the great anxiety and care which the minister has for the farming population of this country—

Some hon. MEMBERS: Hear, hear.

Mr. HANSON (York-Sunbury): —especially those on the western prairies, whom he has bonused time after time to cut down production, I suggest that he and the officials of his department look into this complaint, and that the minister try to persuade his colleague who operates the wartime prices and trade