

*Supply—Agriculture*

this country, and about that time we did import butter because there was not a large carryover.

Item agreed to.

556. To provide assistance for the replacement of maple production equipment—further amount required, \$100,000.

**Mr. Thatcher:** Mr. Chairman, I have one or two questions on this item. I wonder if the minister could say whether this is the item which provides aluminum pails for the maple sugar industry, and also if he could state the amount which appeared in the original estimates? I cannot find an item in the original estimates for this.

**Mr. Harris:** This is the item the hon. member has in mind. Over the years there has been a program of replacing buckets for use in collecting maple sugar. We had thought the job had been completed during the fiscal year ending a year ago, but we found during the course of this present fiscal year that a few were left outstanding, and this is the amount required to clear it up. I am informed that this is probably the last item of this kind.

**Mr. Thatcher:** I thank the minister for his reply. This is one item to which I have strenuously objected over the years. I think for a number of years we were spending \$500,000 a year in this way. It was then reduced to \$300,000 and finally to \$100,000. I am glad to have the assurance of the minister that this is probably the last time we will have this expenditure, because it just does not make sense to me that the taxpayers of Canada should be providing farmers with aluminum pails for collecting maple syrup. If we are going to supply the maple sugar industry with aluminum pails I do not see why we should not supply dairymen with pails and farmers with water pails. This is an expenditure which I hope will be wiped out once and for all.

**Mr. Charlton:** Mr. Chairman, did the minister say this was the last year it would be paid?

**Mr. Harris:** No, I did not; I said probably.

**Mr. Nowlan:** Mr. Chairman, I wish to say something concerning this item, in view of the fact that the minister is not certain the item will not appear again. I was rather intrigued by his statement, because when I came into this house as a freshman some years ago I asked the Minister of Agriculture about this item and he gave us a most interesting and dramatic story in explanation, of how some high pressure salesman had most efficiently sold a vast quantity of buckets

which were resulting in lead poisoning. It was therefore necessary to clear up the matter by supplying aluminum pails.

That appeared to be a reasonable explanation which one could accept. But the whole trouble is, Mr. Chairman, that this epidemic of lead poisoning occurred in 1940, following which this program was launched. I am wondering what degree of tolerance toward lead poisoning has been developed in the last 15 years. The physical structure of the people who were subjected to this poisoning must have been very greatly toughened in the interval, or else everyone has died. Surely there must have been a cut-off date if it was a matter of lead poisoning. If the Minister of Agriculture had not told us that dramatic story I would not have bothered with it again.

**Mr. Harris:** It is very slow poisoning.

**Mr. Nowlan:** It is very slow; it is as slow as death, Mr. Chairman. I think there should be a cut-off if there is this danger of exposure to lead poisoning.

**Mr. Harris:** I can assure you the Minister of Finance agrees with you.

**Mr. Nowlan:** They should remove the poisonous materials altogether. It is a terrible thing that people should be subjected to it for 15 years while this government pays out a large sum of money each year. I do not know what the lifetime of a bucket is, but last year we purchased about 17 million buckets, which is no small amount. I do not know how they would look in this chamber, but I do not imagine we could pile them all in here. I wish the minister could say that the danger of lead poisoning has now ended and that this will be the last payment. If it is not, he had better bring in another supplementary estimate this afternoon and increase the amount so we can get rid of the poisonous buckets once and for all. I am sure the minister of health and welfare, if he knew about it, would be interested in the situation, because people should not be exposed to such terrible poisoning.

**Mr. McCullough (Moose Mountain):** Mr. Chairman, in all seriousness I wish to ask the minister a question. I understand that some maple sugar producers are using plastic bags instead of pails and containers provided by the department. Has any consideration been given to looking into that matter? I notice this item has decreased since last year, and I wonder if the department is considering supplying the maple sugar producers with plastic bags, which would be an economic measure?