

*Strawberries—Prices in British Columbia*

geniuses down here in Ottawa can tell us that we are going to ship twenty per cent by crate, starting to-day, when the berries are not even ripe. That is the position they take, when actually last year we shipped only ten per cent. As hon. members know, when the berries are made into jam you get a very low price.

Last year the average cost of pickers in British Columbia was four cents a pint. That is the way we pay our pickers out there. We pay a basic rate of four cents, and a bonus for staying the whole season. I assume that that is done in other areas of Canada as well. Last year the average cost of production in British Columbia was 12·57 cents per pound. These figures are taken from the records of over 800 berry producers, and they have been averaged over that number. Therefore the figure I have given is last year's average cost. And mark this: I presume everyone knows that the average life of the strawberry plant is five years. In the first year they are planted there is no return to the farmer at all. Then, if you take in the cost of planting, cultivating, fertilizing, thinning, and all the other costs for the first year; hold off any allowance for rental of land, taxes, and add to that the cost of cultivating in the second year, it will be found that the average cost is 9·20 cents per pint. The maximum we are allowed at the rate set to-day is 12 cents.

I could give all sorts of statistics with respect to jam. However, I am prepared to prove my point before the board or anywhere else. I would like to point out that I, as a member for Fraser Valley, along with other members from British Columbia have been pressing this point since early in February. We have been insisting, in the first instance, that if a ceiling was to be placed on the berries we would oppose the ceiling, and I surely think it would be clear why we cannot have a ceiling on perishable goods such as strawberries which must be shipped across the mountains. If we had thought we were getting nowhere in preventing a ceiling being placed on berries, and that we would have had to wait until May 23 to have a ceiling announced, I wish to assure the minister he would not have had a solitary berry planted in the Fraser valley this year. Those berries would not have been planted if we had known that we had to sell them at 12 cents a pint or in other words, pay the consumer for consuming them.

I know it may be said that the board sets all these orders. I can understand perfectly well that if any branch of the government, or

[Mr. Cruickshank.]

any person connected with it, makes a mistake, the minister must assume responsibility for that mistake. In the long run the Prime Minister has to assume the responsibility for the mistakes of his ministers, and, to carry it even further, parliament has to look after the mistakes made by the Prime Minister and his government. I can see no earthly reason why any argument should be advanced against the minister's overruling the wartime prices and trade board. They are doing a very difficult job and, I believe in most cases, the board are doing very well. I give them credit for it. But I do say that when an injustice is being done it is the minister's duty to overrule.

I could give a typical example, in connection with banking. This matter came up before a committee which sits in another room in this building. They were—

Mr. SPEAKER: Order; the hon. member should not make reference to that committee.

Mr. CRUICKSHANK: I withdraw that remark, Mr. Speaker. Then, I would ask the minister—and I believe I have ample support—to give further consideration to this matter. In conclusion I would point out that it is proper to criticize the minister or his department, if one has any suggestion to offer. We who represent the berry growers of the lower mainland—and I believe there are three members who are in that position—met the minister last Friday and made a suggestion to him. We thought we had made a reasonable suggestion, namely, that the dates of the various rates be retarded, a procedure which would have avoided upsetting the whole price structure that has been developed. In other words the rates would be held in abeyance. I am speaking from memory, but I think we suggested that the order be held in abeyance until June 15. It will go into effect to-day, but should be held in abeyance until that date at least. From June 15 to June 27 the rate would be 14½ cents, I believe it was, and from there on it would be 12½ cents. In other words we offered a compromise. We do not wish to make fortunes out of the berry crop, but on the other hand we do not want our farmers to be forced out of existence.

Mr. JAMES SINCLAIR (Vancouver North): Mr. Speaker, on this occasion I speak more as a British Columbia member than as a member representing berry farmers. I have one small district in my constituency in which strawberries are grown. However this is a matter which affects a very large number of the berry farmers in British Columbia. I share an office with the hon. member for Fraser Valley (Mr. Cruickshank) and since