

Labour Dispute at Montreal

which now prevails I believe we can be reasonably sanguine about the prospects for our primary producers in connection with sales of apples to the U.K. in the current year.

Again, because I am sure that this debate will be much more useful to all hon. members if it is based on facts rather than on wild and extravagant hyperbole, I believe we should consider the words of the hon. member for Ontario when he told us that fruits and vegetables were being allowed to rot with hundreds of millions of dollars in spoilage. Naturally we on this side are much concerned about this problem and have been, as the Minister of Labour indicated, all along. He has unquestionably worked night and day in a valiant attempt to do everything possible to alleviate the situation.

At the same time, in the interests of the primary producers of this country, it was my responsibility to keep abreast of the situation and do what I could to alleviate any economic ill effect upon our farmers. The hon. member for Ontario is, I am sure, concerned about the facts. He has a great respect for this house and at no time would he attempt, I know, to mislead hon. members for the purpose of partisan advantage. I was concerned, therefore, when he said that fruit and vegetables have been allowed to rot and spoke of "hundreds of millions of dollars spoilage".

I had a check made this morning to find out whether in fact there was any spoilage or whether anything was rotting on the docks in Montreal. I checked again at noon to make sure of my facts so that in assessing the gravity of the situation hon. members could base their conclusions upon them in determining what ought to be done to solve this problem. As I say, I checked again at noon to find out about these hundreds of millions of dollars lost in spoilage of these fruits and vegetables which were being allowed to rot. I took down the exact words contained in the report of my inspectors in Montreal who have been on this job from the beginning. Their report was that on the docks in Montreal at noon today there were 900 bags of onions and these were the only items that could spoil which were on the docks. These bags were frost-damaged last week prior to the start of the current difficulty and have been left on the docks because of that damage.

This is the actual situation in connection with "fruit and vegetables being allowed to rot" resulting in "hundreds of millions of

dollars spoilage", in the words of the hon. member for Ontario, and on the basis of this information he wished this house to reach sober conclusions on the serious problem which besets primary producers, the parties concerned and the nation as a whole. I hope these few remarks as to the actual nature of the situation will be of some help to the house in reaching a conclusion with regard to this very serious problem.

● (3:50 p.m.)

Mr. McIntosh: Mr. Speaker, may I ask the Minister of Labour a question? Before he sat down he said he would entertain a few questions. I remained in my seat, in view of the fact that the Minister of Agriculture was about to speak, thinking that possibly he would answer some of our questions and it would not be necessary for me to ask them now. I do not mind telling the Minister of Labour that I listened with a very sympathetic ear to the problems that he has encountered in regard to this situation. However, I would suggest that—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member has already taken part in this debate. He can speak only once. He can ask a question if the minister will entertain one.

Mr. Nicholson: I said, Mr. Speaker, that I would gladly entertain any questions if by so doing I could throw any new light on the subject.

Mr. Johnston: Mr. Speaker, I wish to direct a question to the Minister of Agriculture. I had hoped that the minister would have spent less time on the hyperbole of the hon. member for Ontario and a little more time dealing with the problem in competitive markets caused by the surcharge. Will he join his efforts with those of the Minister of Labour (Mr. Nicholson) to negotiate the removal of that surcharge as soon as possible, pending the settlement of the dispute?

Mr. Greene: Mr. Speaker, it is in the area of private enterprise in which the surcharge falls. I understand it is a charge imposed on shippers by virtue of the increased costs of transportation incurred as a result of this situation. I quite agree with the representation made earlier by the hon. member for Okanagan-Revelstoke to the effect that it is inequitable that so often third parties, who have contributed in no way to the strike or slowdown, have to bear the brunt of the cost of the situation that is created. In that respect