

Inquiries of the Ministry

Mr. H. W. Herridge (Kootenay West): I wish to address a supplementary question to the minister because this matter is of urgent importance to some 5,000 fruit growers in British Columbia. I know several members of the cabinet have received telegrams recently in connection with it. In view of the possible early prorogation of parliament they are very anxious that remedial action be taken. Can the minister inform the house what is going to be done in the near future about this question?

Mr. Greene: I concur in the hon. gentleman's statement as to the urgency of consideration, and I appreciate that the matter is a serious one to the fruit growers, particularly those in the Okanagan valley. I can assure the hon. member that I will do everything possible to hasten the resolution of this problem.

Mr. George Muir (Lisgar): I have a supplementary question, Mr. Speaker. I should like to ask the minister if he has looked into the importation of vegetable oils, as he said he would do last week?

Mr. Greene: Mr. Speaker, I do not have a report on that specific question at the moment. I believe I had it here the other day but somehow did not get an opportunity to report to the hon. member. I will undertake to have that report in his office this afternoon.

POTATOES—ASSISTANCE TO IMPROVE
RETURNS TO GROWERS

On the orders of the day:

Hon. J. A. MacLean (Queens): I should like to ask the Minister of Agriculture, in the light of the resolution passed by the Canadian Horticultural Council within the last three weeks and the representations from other interested bodies, whether he is in a position to announce any action which will improve the market and the returns to the producers of Canadian potatoes.

Hon. J. J. Greene (Minister of Agriculture): Mr. Speaker, I have had such representations from the potato industry generally, and there is at present under consideration a program for helping the potato growers who are extremely hard pressed by reason of low prices this year. If such a program is determined upon it will be announced in the proper manner.

Mr. MacLean (Queens): Mr. Speaker, I should like to address a related question to

the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs. Is his department looking into what appears to be a very inefficient and extremely costly distribution system for unprocessed potatoes and other vegetables, under which less than one third of the price paid by consumers in Ottawa and other cities at the present time is getting through to the primary producer?

Hon. John N. Turner (Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs): Mr. Speaker, I will have to look into this matter. I imagine that a good deal of the jurisdiction lies with the marketing boards as well.

Mr. Ed. Schreyer (Springfield): Mr. Speaker, I have a supplementary question I should like to put to the Minister of Agriculture. Inasmuch as the minister has stated that he is keeping continuing watch on the imports of potatoes into western Canada, has the minister now made a decision whether he will accede to the request for the imposition of a value for duty?

Mr. Greene: Mr. Speaker, up to now the decision has been not to place a value for duty on potatoes in the western region owing to the fact that such action would entail retaliatory action by the United States which might very seriously impair the position of other segments of agriculture, and certainly the position of the potato growers in Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick. However, in view of the serious situation created by these prices other action is being contemplated which, if it is determined upon, I believe will be in the best interests of and of great help to the western potato growers as well as those in eastern Canada.

Mr. Schreyer: A further supplementary question, Mr. Speaker. Without being argumentative and challenging the minister's decision, may I simply ask whether his department has made any calculation whether the importation of United States potatoes is at a price level that constitutes dumping?

Mr. Greene: Mr. Speaker, the advice I have is that while United States potatoes are entering Canada, and western Canada in particular, under such circumstances as to constitute an unfair competition in the economic sense, it is not dumping technically according to the definition of that term as laid down in the current GATT agreements.

Mr. W. H. Jorgenson (Provencher): Mr. Speaker, I have a supplementary question.