

Labour Dispute at Montreal

With regard to the other major item which was referred to by members from British Columbia on both sides of the house and by hon. members from Quebec, the one area of concern is apples. The area generally, is that of fruit, though apples form the major area of the problem. I agree with the words of hon. members in respect of the great achievements of the fruit producing industry in British Columbia. Those in that industry have created a viable and efficient industry which, from the standpoint of production, marketing, sales techniques and knowledge, is without peer. That industry makes a great contribution to the Canadian economy.

Mr. Herridge: Hear, hear.

Mr. Greene: It behooves all members of the house, including the government, to make certain that the profitability and effectiveness of that industry are not impaired by external factors which would interfere with its efficient operation.

• (3:40 p.m.)

At the same time, the Quebec apple producers have a close concern with this area and it might be worthwhile to get the facts straight on the situation. I was very worried. I do not believe there is any advantage in overstating the position or stating it in a partisan sense. I believe all hon. members are seriously concerned about the gravity of this problem and its effects upon not only the primary producers and the parties directly concerned but on the Canadian economy generally. They would like to be told the facts in order that their judgment might be based on actual facts rather than on some impression which is not in accord with the facts.

In this connection the hon. member for Ontario spoke—and I was careful to note his exact words—of fruit and vegetables being allowed to rot. He spoke of hundreds of millions of dollars of spoilage. I believe those were the exact words he used. I wrote them down at the time.

Let us consider the situation with respect to apples. At this time last year some 125,000 bushels of apples had gone to the United Kingdom market. The total sales to the United Kingdom market are now some 6,000 bushels less than this—about 119,000 bushels. But in the province of Quebec, where apple production this year has been nearly double what it was last year, exports to the United Kingdom market at this time last year amounted to 38,000 bushels while at this time

[Mr. Greene.]

they amount to some 46,000 bushels. So already there has been a larger exportation from Quebec than had taken place by this time last year.

The hon. member for Kamloops made some constructive and valuable suggestions and I can assure him these have already been followed. Action has already been taken with respect to his suggestion that the Minister of Labour, the Minister of Manpower and Immigration and myself should work together on this problem in the interests of all concerned. But I believe the hon. member was under the impression that the majority of sales on the apple market take place prior to Christmas. According to the instructions I have, this is not the case. The majority of sales to the United Kingdom market take place after Christmas. Therefore in considering this question we should ask ourselves what are the probabilities with regard to future sales in this area.

I have cited these statistics with regard to sales. As to the question of availability and surplus at the present time and the statement that fruit and vegetables are being allowed to rot with hundreds of millions of dollars in spoilage, in the words used by the hon. member for Ontario, the situation is that total storage of apples in Canada has increased by only 3 per cent over last year. This, to my mind, does not suggest that hundreds of millions of dollars have been wasted because of spoilage.

What are the prospects for sales? First, the quantity available for export in the United States, which last year amounted to some 54 million bushels, is at the present time only 48.6 million bushels. So competition from the United States for the United Kingdom market will be that much less. By the same token this government, through the good offices of the Minister of Trade and Commerce and some humble help on my part through meetings with the minister of agriculture of Great Britain, was able this year to increase the quotas substantially with respect to apple sales to the United Kingdom. These two factors taken together portend well for likely sales of apples in the United Kingdom market during the current year.

Granted, none of us is clairvoyant enough to discern at the present time what effect devaluation will have. We are hopeful from the information we have that this year it will not impair our apple sales to the United Kingdom. Despite the difficult situation