

Oral Questions

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Stanfield: Is it the minister's position that prices charged by marketing boards can be regulated and yet have prices left unregulated at the farm gate?

Mr. Whelan: Mr. Speaker, the other day I said that a well run marketing board does not have anything to fear. The prices set by a well run marketing board on behalf of farmers are within reason. This anti-inflation program is a program of reason.

Mr. Stanfield: Does the minister recall telling farm audiences during the last election campaign where my program would end up; that it would go right through the farm gate, into the kitchen and end up in the manure pile?

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Stanfield: Does the minister feel that guidelines with regard to prices set by marketing boards will end up in the same place?

Mr. Whelan: Mr. Speaker, I want to be sure that the Leader of the Opposition is not mixed up about what I said. I said that his program would freeze prices at the farm gate and that everyone knew it would not stop there. It would go through the yard, through the barn and into the manure pile. It did not have anything to do with the kitchen at all.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Whelan: The Leader of the Opposition knows that his program belonged out in the barnyard. The government program is completely different. It does not put a ridiculous freeze on prices, but allows increases where there are increased costs. We are stopping the cost increases where the farmers are concerned. Their input costs will be under strict control. The farmers, therefore, will not have to ask for more money.

IMPACT OF MARKETING BOARDS ON FOOD PRICES—ALLEGED DIFFERENCE OF OPINION BETWEEN MINISTERS

Mr. James A. McGrath (St. John's East): Mr. Speaker, I would like to get the Minister of Agriculture back into the kitchen for a minute. In view of the statement attributed to the minister in a speech he made in St. Jacob's, Ontario last Thursday to the effect that the control program will have little impact on retail food prices and in view of the concern that statement has caused throughout the country, has the minister discussed his differences of opinion with regard to the impact of marketing boards on food prices with the Prime Minister, the Minister of Finance and the chairman of the Anti-Inflation Board?

Hon. E. F. Whelan (Minister of Agriculture): Mr. Speaker, I am not responsible for what a CP reporter has said. If the hon. member wants to listen to the tape—and every word I spoke was taped—he can listen to it and see for himself. I said it would have an impact on food prices because they had the authority to roll them back at the retail level; the essence was there. I said it would not have much effect on farmers themselves; it would not kill the

[Mr. Whelan.]

incentive of farmers to produce those commodities which are in demand in Canada.

Mr. McGrath: May I ask the minister, then, whether he can explain the statement he is purported to have made in Vancouver when he said that marketing boards would continue to set their own prices as they have in the past. Can he reconcile those words with the statement made on Friday by the Prime Minister and the Minister of Finance that marketing boards would be subject to the guidelines.

Mr. Whelan: I never said that marketing boards would not be subject to the guidelines. What I said was that any well run marketing board had nothing to fear from the guidelines.

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THE CANADIAN ECONOMY

ANTI-INFLATION PROGRAM—EFFECT ON THE POOR

Mr. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa-Whitby): A question for the Minister of Finance, Mr. Speaker. Last year the Prime Minister said with regard to the kind of controls the minister has now introduced that any advocate of such controls would be, to use his words, indulging in "political opportunism" if it were not pointed out that a number of serious social costs were involved. One of these the Prime Minister specifically cited, and I quote his words—that "income controls risk hurting the small and the poor more than they do the big and the rich". In view of this concern expressed by the Prime Minister last year, would the hon. gentleman now inform the House what specific elements in his control program are designed to benefit the poor as opposed to other sectors of the community?

Hon. Donald S. Macdonald (Minister of Finance): I would want to ascertain whether the hon. member has made a fair quotation, but I would observe that this program is directly related to the powerful in our community—the big corporations, the professions, the owners of property, particularly the owners of land, and, of course, to big labour, big unions. Any measure which prevents them from taking more out of the economy than is their just share is sure to leave more for the rest of the community, particularly for those in the lower income scale. In this sense it is a program specifically directed to the interest of those who are least in a position to protect themselves.

Mr. Broadbent: Since it is entirely possible that if the growth rate of the economy continues to be zero or negative, the groups which the minister described as being larger and more powerful could get less without the poor people getting any more, is the minister really assuming that if there is some reduction in the overall level of inflation the poor are going to benefit as a result? If this is really his argument is it not also the case that the rich will benefit even more because they have more income to spend?

Mr. Macdonald (Rosedale): It seems to me that a program which prevents the rich, and, in this case, the large and powerful in the community, from getting what all