

prices to consumers in foreign countries. This was done even before trying to find a method to ensure that food supplies or commodities which could not be sold in the marketplace in this country went to Canadians who could not afford to pay the market price.

On this point I speak on my own behalf and not necessarily on behalf of my party, because as far as I know we have not yet worked out in detail such a policy. However, I should like the government of this country to consider establishing a system such as exists in the United States, where a substantial percentage of the surplus food is diverted to people who simply cannot afford to pay the retail price. It is done through distribution of food stamps. This would permit low-income people to obtain foodstuffs such as eggs which may be in temporary surplus supply.

● (1600)

The hon. member for St. John's East, speaking for the official opposition, seemed to endorse the position taken by the Consumers' Association and by Dr. Forbes in calling for the elimination of marketing boards, in this case in respect of eggs and, I suppose, in respect of other commodities; doing away with marketing boards and leaving the production, sale and distribution of food to, as he said, the law of supply and demand. If there is one area of life in which the law of supply and demand has not worked for the producer or for the consumer, it is the production of food. If you look at every product of the farmers of Canada in the last 25 years at least, you see cycles of temporary surpluses followed by shortages. A few years ago the minister in charge of the Wheat Board brought forward a plan under which we paid the farmers of western Canada \$200 million not to produce wheat. A few years later there was a tremendous shortage of wheat. The price of wheat has gone up from \$1.60 a bushel to something like \$5.50 at present.

When the minister in charge of the Wheat Board asked the farmers of western Canada to get out of the production of wheat, they were urged to get into the production of livestock, which they did. Today, there is a temporary surplus of beef. The price paid to the producers of cattle in western Canada has gone down pretty sharply, at a time when the price of feed for their cattle is very high. The price of beef to the consumer has not been reduced. I suggest that it is not the farmer who is benefiting at present, nor is it the consumer: it is the middleman, the processor, the meat packer and the supermarket. That is what supply and demand forces bring about consistently—temporary surpluses and then shortages.

The beef producers of western Canada faced by reduced prices and the high cost of feed are getting out of the business. Hundreds and thousands of farmers in the three prairie provinces are selling their herds. This means that 2½ years from now there will be a shortage of beef and the Canadian consumer will probably pay 50 per cent or 75 per cent more for beef than he is now paying. That is the result of following the old nostrums of supply and demand.

Members of the New Democratic Party will not support the idea that marketing boards work against the interests of the producer and the consumer. It seems to us obvious that the producers of farm products—this includes eggs,

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beef, and everything else used in this country—need the input of a group of consumers, urban people who are working for good wages and are able to pay a fair price for farm products. If they are to produce wheat, farmers must receive a fair price.

Marketing boards have served a useful function in protecting the interests of the farmer. We are not convinced that wiping out marketing boards and leaving the production of eggs, or of any other farm commodity, up to the law of supply and demand will benefit consumers in the long run. On the contrary, we believe it necessary, if we are to provide the consumers of Canada with sufficient food at a consistent and fair price, that farmers be encouraged to produce more foodstuffs and be guaranteed a fair price for them. They must be able to buy feed and other supplies which they need at a price that will encourage them to stay in production and produce more than they have in the past. So we reject the proposal of the so-called experts that marketing boards be eliminated. We reject the idea that the production of eggs be left to the so-called law of supply and demand. We want marketing boards to work efficiently, in the interests of the producer, the farmer and the consumer. For this reason we welcome the proposal to establish a committee to look into the whole question of the supply and the price of eggs. We want the committee to get all the facts.

It seems pretty obvious that CEMA did not operate as efficiently in the interests of the farmer and the consumer as it should. We want to find out in what way CEMA's operations were misguided or less than fully efficient. We want to find out whether the relationship between the national marketing agency and the provincial marketing boards is as fair to producers and consumers as it should be. We want a thorough examination of the whole question. But we do not believe that the way to protect the interests of the producer and the consumer is to wipe out marketing boards. We do not believe that what is needed is a witch-hunt—for which, it seems to me, the hon. member for St. John's East is calling—nor that finding scapegoats will solve the problem of the price of eggs or help the producer or the consumer.

What is needed is a thorough, fair, objective examination of the question so that we can eliminate any inefficiencies. We believe that the consumer is entitled to purchase eggs at a price which he or she can afford. We believe that the farmers, the producers, are entitled to a price for eggs which will encourage them to stay in business and to produce more eggs—if we need more eggs, as I believe we do—without going into debt. If that means subsidies to the producers, we are not opposed to that; we would welcome them. If it means taking steps other than leaving the production, distribution and sale of eggs to the law of the jungle—for which, it seems to me, the hon. member for St. John's East is calling—then we will support any proposal which is fair to the producer and the consumer of eggs in this country.

● (1610)

We welcome the establishment of this committee. Indeed, we have called for it on a number of occasions. We are prepared to see that all the facts are brought forward and that concrete suggestions are made to meet the needs of the people of Canada, the producers and the consumers.