

Agriculture

upon his knowledge of farming to present his case to the minister. I wish he would do the same here.

As is his wont when I speak, the minister is now leaving the House.

Mr. Smith: That is understandable.

Mr. McCain: Perhaps so, but it is rather offensive when it happens repeatedly.

There is another situation where a board of the Government of Canada, after extended hearings, has made recommendations to the minister. It is a report on public hearings carried out by the National Farm Products Marketing Council. It recommends that a board should be established with a board of directors comprised of two producer representatives from each province and two members representing other sectors of the industry and consumers, all members to be appointed by the governor in council on the recommendation of the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Whelan).

It is at this point that I quarrel with that recommendation very vigorously. If we are to have a board to govern the affairs of the potato industry, it should most certainly be made up of members elected by those who will be dealing with their own fate. Those people should not be selected by the governor in council on the recommendation of the Minister of Agriculture. I believe that to be totally unacceptable and unworkable.

I should like to discuss this proposed board for a few moments, Mr. Speaker. In the provinces of eastern Canada, marketing structures are already in place which influence the marketing of potatoes. We find that when one agency or one province tries to arrive at a price, other provinces will undercut it. I am sorry that the minister is not present because I would implore him to consider what happened in exactly these circumstances in the fall of this year and see if he can determine how a marketing board can work under this structure.

I challenge the hon. member for Regina West on this as well. He has suggested that every farmer in Canada should be part of a rigid marketing board structure.

Mr. Benjamin: I did not say that.

Mr. McCain: I challenge the hon. member or any other who says that—

Mr. Benjamin: I didn't say that.

Mr. McCain: —to come up with a plan under which the Government of Canada, unequivocally and with a long-term contractual agreement, can arrange to dispose of a variable crop to the benefit of the farmer as well as of the consumer. That is what is lacking in marketing boards in the fruit and vegetable industry. The constraint of marketing does not fit in with that structure.

Some interesting things are going on internationally and I should like to mention a couple of them tonight. In the state of Maine at the moment there is a movement to try to inhibit the shipment of potatoes from Canada to the United States. I

implore the minister and the Secretary of State for External Affairs (Mr. MacGuigan) to take a long, hard look at the movement presently in place in the United States, particularly in the state of Maine. On an average, we have been the recipients of more potatoes in Canada than we have exported to the United States in the last ten years. In the last two crop years we have shipped more to the United States than we have received, but historically the United States has had the positive side of the interchange of potatoes between the two countries. We have a need for their potatoes, but I submit to you, Mr. Speaker, that the United States too has a need for ours. Because for two years the balance has shifted in our favour, that is no excuse for the rigid barriers to trade which the state of Maine today is trying to establish against our products. This movement goes both ways, from coast to coast in Canada. It is imperative that government at the highest level, from the Minister of Agriculture to the Secretary of State for External Affairs, even to the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau), take a very serious part in the discussions which may lead to the inhibition of trade on an unfair basis. Potatoes moving from eastern Canada to the United States are of a higher quality on a grade basis than vice versa. On that basis I think we have been able to market without cutting prices and without damaging the market, yet the Americans wish to inhibit our shipments to them.

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It is interesting to note that since the present Minister of Agriculture has been in office, he has always had to have a scapegoat. He has always had to have a crutch. He has always had to have something or someone to blame. It is never an acknowledged error on behalf of the Department of Agriculture. Today it may be the banks—perhaps we should not have any sympathy for the banks. Tomorrow, it may be the farmers who will overproduce. It may be the farmers of yesterday who were not organized and could not market. But we have always heard an excuse. There has always been something which has allowed the minister to get off the hook.

He is beginning to be recognized as the one in need of a crutch as he faces the public. What the Whelan crutch will be tomorrow has yet to be determined, but there will be one. Farmers had high expectations that there would be prosperity. Because a few prosper, and there are not that many, that is the excuse for everybody else to prosper and they should not have the minister's sympathy. It is rather unfortunate that those who need price stabilization payments have to depend upon a formula which is outmoded and inadequate. At this point a little history and a little explanation is required.

Not too long ago I spoke to an official in the minister's department. In trying to explain the cost of potato production in Atlantic Canada—and again I am sure the hon. member for Chicoutimi will agree with me—for seed or processing, say in the month of April in the year following planting, interest costs exceed the total costs of production for the same acre of potatoes ten years ago. That is how much the cost of potato production has increased. The executive member of the minister's staff stated that farmers do not borrow all the money they