

Food Policy

Mr. Speaker: I understand there is some disposition to allow two statements to be made consecutively, and then have questions.

Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. This is the second time in the last few days where we have had the Alphonse-Gaston or Mutt and Jeff routine, or whatever you want to call it, with respect to statements. This is not the time to deal with the matter directly, but it does have some effect on the matter of questioning. I realize there are problems between the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Whelan) and the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs (Mr. Abbott). Perhaps one cannot speak for the government. Maybe no one over there can speak for the government. I hope this is a practice that will not be followed further.

I note that the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs intends to speak. We intend to reply to both statements. When the government is making a statement with respect to a matter of policy, that statement should be made by one minister. If there is some disagreement in the government between two ministries as to what the policy is, perhaps the government House leader could make the statement rather than have two ministers bouncing around.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton): We could have a whole field day if we allowed the practice to continue.

Mr. Clark: Wait until Goyer gets back.

Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton): I can foresee a bad parliamentary practice. I rise now to put in a caveat in the friendliest way I know, given the difficulties the government has reconciling these two points of view. It has now been augmented and stirred up with the entry of the hon. member for Crowfoot (Mr. Horner) who is against everything. That hon. member is not even on speaking terms with the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs and probably a few others. I know this causes difficulty, but we ought to observe the rules of the House.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. I understand the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs (Mr. Abbott) is prepared to make a statement on motions. The practice is for a minister to make a statement. If the House wants to accommodate the making of both statements and follow with questions on both statements, it can do so. However, if the House does not want to do that it is not compelled to do so. It is a question of whether it is convenient for those members who want to receive the information before putting questions. I presume it is a departure from our regular practice and therefore requires consent.

Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton): Mr. Speaker, I was aware of what the practice was going to be in this case. I spoke to the Minister of Agriculture and the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs, and they very kindly delivered two state-

ments. What I am doing now is filing a caveat for the future so that this kind of practice will not continue. Somehow or other ministers ought to get together and make one statement. This is important for the rules of the House of Commons. We are having two statements today; tomorrow we could have three. Frankly, I think this is a bad practice. However, because of the discussions I am prepared to let the matter go today. In any event, I want to enter that caveat as strongly as I can.

• (1230)

Mr. McGrath: Since this represents a departure from normal practice, Mr. Speaker, I should like some guidance from the Chair. Apparently we are to hear statements from two ministers. If that is the intention, with your consent, since you are the custodian of the practices of the House, I should like to know whether it is Your Honour's intention to allow members who wish to ask questions afterwards, in accordance with the provisions of the Standing Order, extra time in which to address questions to both ministers, as compared with the time usually allocated when one minister makes a statement.

Hon. A. C. Abbott (Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs): Mr. Speaker, I thank hon. members for their indulgence. I am pleased to have the opportunity of making a statement at this stage. As hon. members are aware, the food strategy document has been published over the names of myself and the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Whelan), so I am pleased to have the opportunity to add a few words to what he has said and to give my full support to the document which he has just tabled. Before commenting on the particular interest of consumers I should like to make some general observations about food policy.

I have long been an advocate of a national food policy for Canada and believe we need a strategy for food just as we need national policies for defence, energy or transportation. Our food policy must apply to all parts or components of the food system: to consumers as well as to farmers, to processors and to retailers, to the suppliers of farm inputs and to the exporters and importers of food products and agricultural commodities. Nor should we overlook the role of the fishing industry in our food system.

From the point of view of consumers, a food strategy should assure them of the right to reasonable prices and nutritious food. At the same time, the strategy must be designed to maintain a strong and competitive agricultural industry in Canada and to promote greater efficiency and productivity in food processing, distribution and retailing. But we should not forget that the interests of these various components of the food system do not always coincide. A food strategy is, thus, something of a compromise based on good relations and close co-operation between the various departments and ministers, each with a role in food policy operation and development. I am very pleased that we have been able to develop a food strategy for Canada. It is a clear demonstration of the importance the government attaches to the concerns urban consumers have expressed about the supply, price and quality of their food. This document we have put before the House today