

Canadian Egg Marketing Agency

rationally or amply explained to the public. A Toronto exporter stated that he received an order from Austria for 50 million eggs, but it was turned down by CEMA. Perhaps this gentleman will appear before the committee and give us the facts.

Mr. Whelan: I certainly hope he does.

Mr. McGrath: With reference to the minister's interjection, he's had it, and he knows it. Getting back to my own province, we have the story of the 250,000 eggs that CEMA shipped from Newfoundland to Surrey, British Columbia. Why, in the name of God, would we ship 250,000 eggs from one end of the country to the other at a time when egg prices in Newfoundland were soaring, only to find that when the eggs arrived in British Columbia they had rotted in transit? This was the result of mismanagement, since it took, I believe, three weeks for the eggs to get from Newfoundland to Surrey, B.C. Whose fault is that? Who takes the ultimate responsibility for that?

● (1550)

Mr. Whelan: Did CEMA drive the train?

Mr. McGrath: CEMA had an obligation to ensure that the eggs were received in good condition. This was not done. It is rather interesting, in talking about Newfoundland and British Columbia, to realize that here are two provinces which have already publicly threatened to withdraw from CEMA because they know it is not working, under the present administration, to the advantage of the consumer or the producer. There is public indignation in Canada, and rightly so. Canadians should be indignant. We would be a heartless people if we were not indignant because, at a time when millions of the world's population face starvation or malnutrition, millions of eggs were allowed to rot in storage in Canada through mismanagement, especially at a time when Canadians are paying the highest prices ever for food and are faced with increasing inflation.

We have revelation after revelation of eggs being destroyed and plowed into the ground because they have been allowed to rot, through the careless mismanagement of people who have been given a licence by the people of Canada to control the supply and distribution of eggs in this country. It has been estimated by a former moderator of the United Church of Canada that one egg would keep alive one starving child for one day. That is something to think about. If these eggs had been preserved in powdered form, they could have been supplied to the world, through the government's food program, to alleviate some of the malnutrition and starvation which exists.

It is not sufficient for the Minister of Agriculture to try to pass the buck. It is not enough for him to try to blame those who cannot speak for themselves, because the ultimate responsibility is his alone. I am sorry the minister has just stepped out of the chamber. The Minister of Agriculture is guilty of maladministration and neglect of his ministerial responsibilities under the Farm Products Marketing Agencies Act.

I hope the committee will be allowed to carry out its mandate and to function without interference from the government of Canada. I have doubts in this regard, espe-

[Mr. McGrath.]

cially having seen the membership from the government side of the House. The membership of the committee includes the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs (Mr. Cafik), who has a reputation in this House of being the government's hatchetman in committees. From that moment on I became very skeptical about how much latitude this committee will have. However, should the committee be given latitude and permitted to carry out its inquiry unencumbered by government interference, it will show conclusively two things; that the minister is guilty of maladministration and neglect in the performance of his duties, and that he tried—and failed—to cover up this whole sordid affair.

Mr. David Orlikow (Winnipeg North): Madam Speaker, on behalf of the New Democratic Party it is my intention to support this motion to establish a committee. I am not sure, however, that we should support the establishment of a committee if such is dependent upon the case put forward by the first speaker for the official opposition. I believe I would still be in doubt, in that circumstance, as to whether to support the motion.

The hon. member spent a good deal of time attacking the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Whelan). I am certain there are good reasons for criticizing the minister. The hon. member also spent a good deal of time criticizing the action, or lack of action by officials of CEMA. I am also certain there is much to be critical of in respect of their action. But the hon. member gave us very little in the way of information about what should be done so that the consumer will get eggs at a reasonable price and the producer will receive a price which permits him to remain in the business of producing eggs.

We received from the hon. member for St. John's East (Mr. McGrath) very little of a constructive nature in respect of the basic problem concerning eggs in this country. We, as members of the New Democratic Party, are as concerned about the destruction of millions of eggs as we would be concerned about the destruction of any foodstuff, especially at a time when so many people are hungry, so many people are starving and when, even in an affluent country like Canada, there are many people in the cities, in the rural areas and among our native population who simply do not have an adequate diet. So we look with a great deal of concern and disappointment at policies which permit wastage and destruction of important foodstuffs.

If there was mismanagement on the part of CEMA, then the people of Canada should know what happened and why it happened. We must have these answers, not merely because millions of eggs already have been permitted to go bad but because we must know what happened in order to do whatever is necessary to avoid similar situations occurring. We must ensure that eggs are produced and distributed as efficiently and as economically as possible.

I want to say on my own behalf—I do not claim to be an expert on the production of eggs although I do represent an urban constituency where many people consume eggs—that I find this situation strange because when we have had surpluses in the past, whether in eggs, butter or any other foodstuff, governments—both Liberal and Conservative—have gone out of their way to dispose of the surpluses by selling them at bargain prices or at give-away