

Finance

to import but which we are presently importing to the detriment of the Canadian dollar and our total economy.

From coast to coast in Canada federal policies have contributed to a decline in the export of agricultural products, fresh and processed. I suppose the most stark example of idiotic policy was the failure of the government to hold the international markets which we had, and to combine that with an increase in the quota for cheese to be imported from abroad. We lost the U.K. market, we lost the European Economic Community market, and in turn we increased the imports of cheese to Canada. These are two contradictory measures which, for the benefit of the hon. member for Comox-Alberni, have accentuated our unfavourable cash flow differential and therefore have affected the value of the dollar.

I suggest to you, Mr. Speaker, that a reasonable and rational duty and trade policy must be adopted by Canada at GATT. We must obtain fair and equal trading opportunities with our world trading partners. We can no longer exist while duties on our products to our friendly trading partners are prohibitive, while our market is traded away for advantages about which the farmers are not informed and which are very unsatisfactory to the total economy.

We have a government dealing in total secrecy at GATT. Its members have had input which they have rejected. They have had a tariff report which has been criticized and for which there were amendments requested by agriculture in Canada. There has been no consideration given to this as far as the public knows. It is totally secret. This is not satisfactory.

We have increased imports and we have generated a weak agricultural economy. For the information of the hon. member for Comox-Alberni, we have a decline in the Canadian dollar which has put a temporary protection on agricultural products, but only temporary. We must have a trading pattern which must be permanent. If by chance the fluctuation of the dollar gives a temporary position of advantage to any industry such as agriculture, we know it will be only temporary because, sooner or later, sanity will return to the economists and government, and the dollar will return to its proper value.

The net farm income of agriculture is going down. Imports are going up, whether they be fresh or processed. The Conservative party does not stand for that kind of treatment for agriculture and that kind of effect upon the Canadian dollar's value. This industry has contributed \$1 billion in trade surplus historically. It has recently declined to about three quarters of a billion, and it will decline even further if we do not have a marketing structure, with farming representatives of Canada being abroad, something we do not have at this time. In the hundred or more nations where we are represented, we have eight agricultural representatives to promote our agricultural trade. Some of those are located in cities where we could not sell anything unless they had none of a certain product or were starving. Therefore, we are not promoting trade.

● (2352)

Whether it be fruits or vegetables from British Columbia, dairy products from Quebec, fruits and vegetables from the

[Mr. McCain.]

Niagara Peninsula, the potato products of the Atlantic area, or the apple products of Nova Scotia, they have all been seriously affected by adverse trade negotiations conducted by this government in the last ten years. Our party does not stand for that. We believe that the billion dollars of favourable trade balance can be expanded. When it is expanded, it will increase the profitability of agriculture. When agriculture is more profitable, the economy of Canada as a whole will rise.

I suggest to the hon. member for Comox-Alberni that he acquaint himself with the curve of prosperity in Canada and relate it to the net farm income of Canada. He will see they are parallel. When agriculture is weak, the Canadian economy weakens. I make that as a concrete suggestion to the hon. member for Comox-Alberni, a suggestion which could favourably affect the value of the Canadian dollar. It would increase the favourable balance of payments which agriculture can generate and which we need to restore the dollar to its value.

I want to assure the farmers that we do not and never have associated ourselves with policy of slow stabilization payments, or trading away agricultural benefits for hidden benefits to some other industry, creating low income for farmers. That is not our policy. We wish we had a chance to correct it. We surely would take the necessary measures.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Adrien Lambert (Bellechasse): Mr. Speaker, we say that a man should seek the advice of his pillow. I therefore hope that this debate which is going on into the night will help the Minister of Finance (Mr. Chrétien) steer the right course for the monetary policies of our country. As for us parliamentarians, we are supposed to represent the supreme authority in the land. After this debate, we may be able to give good advice to the Minister of Finance and the cabinet.

Mr. Speaker, this debate should remind us that a monetary system is a tool which a people devises for itself. In all civilized and well organized nations there is a monetary system which serves to establish as they occur the value of things and services, and to allow the citizens to exchange services and goods. That is the role of the monetary system.

We have succeeded, in Canada. We are about to succeed in transforming our measurement system. We are gradually changing over to the metric system in all spheres of economic activity. Mr. Speaker, it is not easy to make such a change in a country like Canada. However, the government got to work and passed legislation to determine the time when such and such sector of the economy would switch to the metric system. The population accepts this and is ready to co-operate.

I meet many people in the industrial sector and many people who travel throughout Canada to promote sales for such or such a company. Housewives are accepting to change their cooking habits because the Canadian Parliament decided that those changes would be better for Canada. For my part, Mr. Speaker, I sincerely believe that the change to the metric system is much more difficult to achieve than a change in our monetary system.