

ployment. We have had studies done, but I have seen no evidence of action.

Both the Minister of Agriculture and the Minister of Transport keep telling me that they are still considering recommendations coming before them, that they will shortly present recommendations to their cabinet colleagues, that they hope to meet shortly with provincial representatives, as the Minister of Transport said to me on May 2, and that they hope to meet at an early date with the premier of Prince Edward Island. But neither minister has indicated to me that he has had satisfactory, direct consultation with potato interests in New Brunswick or Prince Edward Island. Even more important, the Minister of Transport has not given us a firm date as to when federal action will be taken in this field.

One talks about disparities existing in this country, but I suggest there has been no greater disparity than that illustrated by the minister's action a month ago when he ordered a further 2,000 grain cars from the manufacturing plants of this country, to be added to some 6,000 already purchased by the federal government for the transport of western grain. Yet for eastern Canadian potato producers, not one single car has yet been purchased or ordered by the government. This shows a shocking inconsistency. If there were a realistic and balanced policy with respect to providing equitable transportation facilities for both eastern and western Canada, surely we could expect more action from the government than we have seen up to the present on this crucial question.

Mr. Irénée Pelletier (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Agriculture): Mr. Speaker, the problems related to the distribution of last season's maritime potato crop have been well documented and thoroughly discussed. As the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Whelan) has indicated previously, he is most concerned that the distribution system not just be patched to prevent a recurrence of last season's problems, but that it be rebuilt in such a manner as to become a reliable system which will deliver a high quality product and encourage the purchase of maritime-produced potatoes.

The interdepartmental committee on maritime potato distribution has been working with this objective in mind. It has not filed a final report because, among other activities related to this topic, its members have been involved in discussions with provincial, industry and government representatives. As the Minister of Transport (Mr. Lang) has said, "We are awaiting a meeting with the provincial premier and the minister of transport of Prince Edward Island as a further concrete step in the resolution of this issue". Nevertheless, I can assure the hon. member that the committee's work will be completed and activities will be initiated in a time-frame to prevent a recurrence of last season's problems.

The troubles that can be initiated or continued through a panic band-aid solution must be avoided, and the strongly positive results sought will be achieved through the thorough planning and the discussion of solutions that is now taking place between the interdepartmental committee chaired by Agriculture Canada and including representatives from Transport Canada, the National Harbours Board, and the provincial

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governments of New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island, as well as key industry representatives. I can assure the hon. member that the results of these efforts will mean that future crops, including next season's, will move smoothly to their respective markets.

Those are the notes from the department, but I can add that the minister envisages the possibility of the Canadian government eventually buying cars which could be put to the use of the potato producers of the maritime provinces. This is one of the topics which has been discussed in the department although I do not believe the suggestion has yet been put before the cabinet. I know the minister has discussed it with maritime producers and with officials from the hon. member's province and from my own native province of New Brunswick. This is a matter which has been of great concern to the department for the past two years, and we hope that this year we can arrive at a formal solution which will be beneficial to producers and satisfactory to consumers also.

CANADIAN MINT—REASON FOR ACCEPTING ORDERS FOR COINS FROM FOREIGN COUNTRIES

Mr. Bill Clarke (Vancouver Quadra): Mr. Speaker, on March 31 I asked the Minister of Supply and Services (Mr. Goyer) a question concerning contracts awarded to the Royal Canadian Mint.

Before I deal with the substance of the question I wish to comment on the answer given to my supplementary question. I asked whether the services of agents had been used in obtaining these contracts, because the State of Israel was involved as one of the countries to which the coins were sold. I asked whether the government had used the services of Shaul Eisenberg or other agents in obtaining these contracts. The minister replied "The question does not sound very serious." That response raises a question in itself. I fail to see how it is up to the minister to decide whether or not a question is serious. Surely that falls to Your Honour. Besides that, the use of agents, particularly Shaul Eisenberg, has been the topic of much debate in and around this Chamber of recent months, and only today very serious questions were asked in connection with agent's fees in that particular case.

● (2210)

As far as the question itself is concerned, Mr. Speaker, it really has two parts. The first asks why has the government found it desirable to be in the business of producing coins for sale, in competition with private sector minting companies. The minister said that the mint, in doing so, does not compete with the private sector. I have had reason to contact some private minting companies. I do not know how many there are but I think there are at least six in Canada, and they certainly feel that the Royal Canadian Mint is competing with them.

If I may refer to some correspondence that I have had with them, the Sherritt Mint has been in business since 1961 and was selling blanks to the Mint itself. In 1964 the Sherritt Mint went into the export market for blanks only, and in 1966 it obtained its first export order. It finds that it is competing with