

*Food Policy*

**Mr. Nystrom:** Mr. Speaker, I have questions for both ministers, but I will start with a good Conservative. Would the minister be willing to have his food policy advisory group appear before the standing committee on agriculture so that the committee could have some input?

**Mr. Abbott:** I am sorry; would the hon. member repeat his question, please?

**Mr. Nystrom:** Would the minister be in favour of letting the food advisory group appear before the committee so that they can be questioned? This might be valuable to the committee.

**Mr. Abbott:** This is a new idea, Mr. Speaker. Certainly I do not regard myself as a good Conservative; in fact, I have rarely met a good Conservative. I do not think it would be reasonable to ask policy advisers to appear before the committee. They really do not have any responsibility as civil servants apart from advising the department.

**Mr. Nystrom:** Mr. Speaker, my next question concerns the suggestion in the policy statement about investigation into the processing, retailing and distribution industries. What is meant by an investigation? The competition bureau already has some power, so is the minister going to make changes?

**Mr. Abbott:** What we stated is that the government undertakes to concentrate on the competitiveness of food processing, distribution and retailing by monitoring the performance of the sector, including a variety of other definitions. In no case does the paper say it is going to do more than direct the bureau of competition, also falling under my responsibility, in an appropriate manner to study this sector. This is not, as was stated on radio, an investigation or any sort of witch-hunt. We are simply going to look across the board at the competition features of that economy, or lack thereof, and direct the competition bureau to keep a vigilant eye and carry out inquiries as it intends to do in a variety of economic areas in various parts of the country.

**Mr. Nystrom:** I will switch now to the more progressive minister. There was a gap in the policy, and I should like to ask about this area, that is, self-sufficiency in food production. According to the stance of the government in the paper tabled this morning, if we take away grains and oilseeds we had a deficit of \$1.9 billion last year. I think that is important in terms of the balance of payments and jobs. What plans does the government have to produce more food and become self-sufficient? The deficit will probably increase because the price of grain is falling. It will probably be over \$2 billion next year.

**Mr. Whelan:** Mr. Speaker, one thing I want to make clear is that everybody on this side of the House is very forward-thinking. I would not be found guilty of using that word the Conservative party has used so often and that has proved so false—"progressive." We have done all kinds of studies. We know that we import more food than we need in order to have a proper diet in Canada. The minister from Prince Edward Island is not here, and I do not see any other members from that province in the House, although there are some from New

[Mr. Abbott.]

Brunswick. For their benefit, I want to say that one medium-sized potato, without gravy or any other garnish, will provide all the vitamin C one person needs in a day—and it is not fattening. We import too much of that sort of thing into Canada.

**Mr. Fraser:** The "one spud a day" boys march again.

**Mr. Whelan:** I did not hear what the hon. member said. If it was as great as his contribution to the Conservative leadership campaign, maybe it does not matter. We are exploring trade with developing countries which produce things we cannot produce here. The hon. member from western Canada stated that if it were not for cereal grains we would not have the balance of trade that we enjoy in food. I would point out, however, that without the other farmers we would have to import all our food and would be paying high prices for it.

I think his suggestion is ridiculous. He spoke about vegetable oilseeds, etc. But, Mr. Speaker, we are in a very fortunate position. Our agricultural industry is very productive. I apologize for what I said about the hon. member being ridiculous, if he was referring to the great productive capacity of farmers in western Canada. Even Ontario is rapidly becoming as great a grain producer as Manitoba. Production has gone from 30 million bushels of corn to 160 million or 180 million bushels in Ontario alone. There is no reason why we cannot be self-sufficient in oil-bearing seeds and even export more than we do at present. These are some of the things that our scientists and researchers are constantly working on.

The hon. member put a question regarding supply-management to the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs. I do not know why he did not ask me, because I would like to comment on that. I do not think we need any more supply-management in agriculture than in any other industry—the taxi business in Ottawa, for instance.

**Mr. Nystrom:** A last question, Mr. Speaker. I asked the minister what policy he had to produce more food in Canada. He talked about grain, corn and potatoes, but did not answer the question. The paper he tabled today shows that if grains and oil seeds were omitted, the deficit would be \$1.9 billion. Is it the policy of the government to produce more food in this country, or is it not? That is very important, not only for farmers but in order to create jobs in the processing industry, the balance of trade, and so on.

**Mr. Whelan:** Mr. Speaker, I do not want to take up too much of the time of the House. When the hon. member talks about producing more food, I hope he is not suggesting that we produce it, just pile it up then hope somebody will buy it. That would be acting like Santa Claus. If we just use stabilization, then efficient producers will take advantage of the program and we will end up with piles of food that have to be distributed, or dumped. Is that what the hon. member means by more food production? I know that my farmers—our farmers, I should say, or my farmers, because I am the Minister of Agriculture, or at least part of the Minister of Agriculture—