

Customs Tariff

Mr. Nystrom: I am just doing that to point out to the hon. member for Mississauga—

Mr. Blenkarn: Take away oranges—we do not produce any.

Mr. Nystrom: I hope the hon. member for Mississauga will get up and enlighten us on farm goods, as he did a while back on the Indian problem.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Nystrom: If you take away the two commodities we produce in abundance, we find we are a net importer of food in Canada. According to the Science Council of Canada—that is part of my phrase on self-sufficiency for the hon. member for Mississauga—even with the oil seeds and grain that we produce in abundance on the prairies, by the year 2000 we will be a net importer of food. That concerns me.

I could point to many studies and statistics to show that agricultural land is going out of production. For example, I think of the Niagara Peninsula. A friend from there was talking to me about some of the problems that the grape growers and the wineries have. In the Niagara Peninsula a lot of good farm land is being paved over and used in a permanent sense for other than producing food. That concerns me as well.

One way of aiding in self-sufficiency—I stress one way because it is not a magical formula—is to give the producers a bit more tariff protection than we have given them in the past. That is one way of becoming a little more self-sufficient in food. I do not have to go into all the other arguments about self-sufficiency of food or why it is important. One could look at the United Nations' report made public last week. It talks about an immense crisis coming before the end of the century in terms of world food production and our capability to produce food. One can look at other stats that came out recently showing that in the world this year we will be consuming more food than we produce. That means we will be going into reserves and using food which has been stockpiled for emergencies.

This country and other countries around the world must be concerned about the production of food, and we must be concerned about producing as much as we possibly can. In the past we have said that perhaps we can rely on imports, that perhaps imports are cheaper. Perhaps we think that American chicken, eggs, fruit and so on are cheaper, but I remind hon. members that that hurts Canada in terms of the extra farmers we could have, the extra jobs we could have in producing, processing and transporting that food. It also hurts Canada in terms of balance of trade and its impact on the dollar.

If this were a more general debate, Mr. Chairman, one could give the House many statistics about the economic loss of not being self-sufficient. One could give the House figures of jobs lost in Ontario as well as right across the country because we are not self-sufficient in many food areas.

My representation to the government across the way is that I think there are many different fruits and vegetables and many different items where there could be another minor

adjustment upward in terms of tariffs. The member for Mississauga is concerned about costs. We are not talking about building huge tariff walls. The Ontario Federation of Agriculture, the Canadian Federation of Agriculture and reputable farm groups have good relationships with all political parties in this House. They are not talking about that either. They are just talking about some seasonal tariff protection. Some of that is provided in this bill. The bill is going in the right direction, we know that. However, a lot of producers do not think it is going far enough.

● (1550)

As the hon. member for Timiskaming mentioned, there is concern that perhaps the apparatus that gives us the eight-week tariff may not come into effect rapidly enough when there is a problem. The committee should be thinking more about ways of becoming self-sufficient in food, producing more of the food consumed in this country. Agriculture is the key industry, the number one industry in this country. Historically countries with a strong agricultural base are those which do best in the world community.

In terms of specifics, historically we have had no tariff on potatoes. Apples were mentioned. Apple growers in British Columbia have brought their concern to my attention. Although the situation may be relatively rosy in that province at the moment, growers in Washington and Oregon have started an immense program of planting new orchards. When they come on stream in a few years, that will cause serious competitive problems and may create a lot of difficulty for B.C. apple producers. I remind the committee of the competitive advantage the Americans have because of cheaper land costs, better growing climate and so on.

Another commodity is potatoes. Coming from New Brunswick, the Chairman knows a lot more about that than I do. New Brunswick is a tremendous potato producing area. Again we must look at the possibility of adequate tariff protection for our potato growers. It is relatively easy to get into potato crops; it is not like apples where it takes some time for the tree to grow. The potato market can be rapidly distorted with prices going up and down. It is a relatively quick enterprise to get into.

These are some of the concerns I have. They are motivated by the primary concern that one of our fundamental objectives in a food policy for this country is to be self-sufficient. For some of our foods, that will require an upward push, not a great one though, in tariffs in this country. In my opinion, that will not be a cost to the consumer in the long term but will protect consumers, giving them a guaranteed supply.

Mr. Peters: Mr. Chairman, I did not understand the explanation with regard to the tariff on an American product being at the American price. I suppose it is a price at a given time in a given area. If that is so, what we are talking about is a 16 per cent advantage.

Mr. Blenkarn: No, no.