

Food Policy

St. John's East referred to a committee recommendation of 1973. I was a member of the former joint committee of the House of Commons and the other place at that time. There has been much talk of a food policy and a food strategy. As I said earlier, there will probably be much more talk; but as far as I am concerned, if a committee can be informative and if it can make information available to the people of Canada with regard to our food policy and with regard to what kind of strategy we should have to improve that food policy, that might be a good thing.

Mention was made here earlier about the things we are doing in scientific research. I think we are too quiet about that, because people from many other parts of the world and people from much larger nations than ours come here to see what our agricultural scientists and research people are doing. We are the envy of the world because we live in the northern hemisphere and are as productive as we are. I tend to lean toward the hon. member's suggestion, but how quickly we can get on with it is another matter. The hon. member is aware of the committees we have and the backlog of work they have. However, we will certainly be discussing this matter further.

Mr. Murta: I am glad to hear the minister say that. I concur with him, and I think the idea most of us here would have for a committee would be to use knowledgeable people from the various sectors of the food industry. We should use producers, processors and consumers. We should strike a special committee. In that way the whole question could be put before the public and discussion could be generated.

It has been adequately expressed that it was a very watered down and a somewhat limp statement made this morning by the two ministers involved. It really was a statement of the obvious, except that the Minister of Agriculture mentioned that a working committee would be struck this fall. As I understand it, this committee will consist of intergovernmental people. What prompted this kind of statement in the first place? It was really a statement of the obvious. Certainly, those of us who have been involved with agriculture and food policy want to know what the government is doing and what the various political parties are doing. Much time has been consumed, and the various roles of the various segments of our food industry have not been clarified. Did consumers ask for this statement? Did producers ask for it? Did the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs want this kind of statement? What was the reason for it?

Mr. Whelan: Mr. Speaker, I think it is a result of a series of occurrences. There have been requests from various groups in Canada. It is the result of political commitments of the government of Canada. The government committed itself to putting this kind of program together. The hon. member says he wants an interparliamentary committee of the Senate and the House. Perhaps the hon. member did not say the Senate: perhaps I am putting words in his mouth. However, that would probably be a satisfactory committee as far as I am concerned and bearing in mind my philosophy on the other place. A paper was referred to this morning by two hon. members who

spoke before we adjourned at one o'clock. When we speak of a paper in terms of its being a political document, I do not think the hon. member would suggest that we should use any such thing as a political document unless we are afraid of its substance.

Mr. Fraser: There was not much substance.

Mr. Whelan: When one studies the facts which have been put together in the document and the recommendations which are made in it, one can see that this is the first time such a document has been put together. It was put together in co-operation with the Department of Fisheries, the Department of Finance and all the other departments directly involved in this program. The program involves food production, processing, distribution, transportation, and so forth. The food industry is the largest industry we have, and many people have to be involved in it. So the statement came about as a result of requests from many different sources.

Mr. Murta: Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask a question of the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs. I do not know whether I am putting words into his mouth, but I think he alluded to a preference for other methods of marketing besides supply-management. I would like to ask the minister whether the Department of Consumer and Corporate Affairs has a group of public servants assessing, from the department's point of view, methods of marketing other than the supply management concept which, of course, is based on supply and demand. Is anybody looking at other methods of marketing which may be applicable to the Canadian agricultural situation?

Mr. Abbott: As I understand the definition of supply-management, in contrast to the hon. member's point, the government attempts, through a board, to judge what the supply and the demand will be and to allocate quotas for supply, and so forth. This is an innovative technique which, if it were based on any further application, would be less preferred than other methods. This does not mean, contrary to the popular view, that I am opposed to the general concept of marketing boards, and I have said that on many occasions.

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I have what is known in the department as a food policy group composed of some very able people who advise me on specific food matters. They do not spend their time studying alternative methods of supply-management, however, because we honestly believe that for the majority of commodities in Canada we already have a marketing system which has proved very effective. We also have emergency procedures for border protection of imported products which may come in at distress or dump prices, and we have stabilization plans for producers to protect them from market fluctuations. It is not a matter of dreaming up some revolutionary, new scheme for marketing. There is an existing apparatus that has proved very effective, and I am somewhat reluctant to move into supply-management for a greater number of products than it already applies to.