

AGRICULTURE

REQUEST FOR REPORT ON PROPOSED AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTS EXPORT DIVISION

Mr. John Wise (Elgin): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of Agriculture. For the last two years, members on this side of the House have asked for the establishment of an agricultural products export division within the Department of Agriculture, to work with the provinces and to work with commodity organizations to seek out and develop export markets for agricultural commodities.

Earlier this week—in fact, on Monday to be exact—I understand that a meeting was held between the minister and interested people within the agricultural industry to seek out ways and means to develop export markets. I must indicate that I welcome the minister's eleventh-hour interest in this very important subject. I ask the minister what progress was made and, secondly, did the provinces participate?

Hon. E. F. Whelan (Minister of Agriculture): Mr. Speaker, I think I should first put the record straight. I would have serious doubt about the originality of this suggestion—the claim that the hon. member has made that it came from the other side of the House. Many other people have put this forward. For instance, I would think it has come from farm organizations, etc. At the last Liberal conference it was passed, fully endorsed, and then some other people picked it up afterwards and tried to carry it.

This was an exploratory meeting that we held on Monday. The response was good. It was with agricultural officials and officials from the Department of Industry, Trade and Commerce. They seem to be in full support of the suggestion of this kind of an organization being worked out between the departments here in Canada, for the good of agriculture.

Mr. Wise: Mr. Speaker, if a new system or structure is established, can the minister give me the assurance that those assigned to this particular responsibility will be aggressive sales and market-oriented people?

Mr. Whelan: Mr. Speaker, the whole intent is just that. You would have an aggressive sales type of program. As it is stated in the presentation which we made to them at that time, we would want to see the provinces participating in this program and we want to see the federal departments concerned with the same issue participating in it, and probably a broader spectrum of the agricultural producers in Canada being brought into it, which we hope to do early in the new year.

REASON FOR CANCELLATION OF COMMITTEE MEETING

Mr. Gordon Towers (Red Deer): Mr. Speaker my supplementary question is to the Minister of Agriculture. In view of the fact that the export of barley has been dropping in western Canada and the elevators are plugged, with the result there are fire-sale prices of feed barley accumulating in western Canada, and the Canadian Wheat Board cannot be held to account until such time as the Standing Committee on Agriculture is

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organized—and such a meeting was scheduled for this afternoon—could the minister tell the House why this meeting was cancelled, along with several other organizational meetings?

Hon. E. F. Whelan (Minister of Agriculture): Mr. Speaker, I have no knowledge of the meeting being cancelled at all. I understood it was going to go ahead. However, some of the preamble that the hon. member put to his question I do not accept.

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SOCIAL INSURANCE

EXTENDED USE OF SOCIAL INSURANCE NUMBERS—POTENTIAL INVASION OF PRIVACY

Mr. James A. McGrath (St. John's East): Mr. Speaker, I would like to direct a supplementary question to that posed by my colleague, the hon. member for Saskatoon-Biggar, to the Minister of Employment and Immigration who we are told is the minister responsible for SIN.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. McGrath: I ask the minister this question in view of the finding in the report on privacy and computers, commissioned by the Department of Communications, as follows:

—a single identifying number should not be adopted in Canada, directly or indirectly, without a full examination and public debate of its merits and consequences.

In view of the potential invasion of privacy that is represented by the extensive use of the social insurance number, could the minister tell the House what controls he has adopted to ensure that the social insurance number is not abused and does not, in fact, represent a massive invasion of privacy in this country without parliament having a chance to debate it?

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Hon. Bud Cullen (Minister of Employment and Immigration): Mr. Speaker, we are in the process of preparing guidelines to ensure that information which we secure through the social insurance number will not violate the human rights legislation. The privacy provisions have not, in fact, been violated.

Under the old act, the commission had authority to release information, but that was always generally within the parameters of the act. Last year, when we moved amendments to the bill, the hon. member's colleague from Hamilton West suggested that the discretion should rest with the minister. We changed section 114 of the act to put that discretion in my hands.

However, we do not encourage outside use of the social insurance number as an identifier. I think in three particular regions the federal government has legislative authority to use the social insurance number: I think of the Canada Pension Plan, income tax and, of course, unemployment insurance.

Mr. McGrath: Mr. Speaker, the minister, like his colleague the Minister of National Health and Welfare, does not really