

February 16.

Tomato Growers Suffer By Selling Below Cost, Tory Member Asserts

Canning Companies Are Assailed for Methods of Purchase and Northumber- land M.P.P. Hints at Proposing Inquiry — Scores Unreasonable Mass Buying

With a strong attack on "the abuse of capital," Fred J. McArthur, Conservative member for Northumberland, precipitated the problem of "mass buying" on the floor of the Ontario Legislature yesterday. Taking as his text the charge that great canning companies pay prices for tomatoes considerably lower than the farmers' cost of production, the Conservative member urged co-operation and threatened, if that were not forthcoming, to propose an investigation.

Mr. McArthur spoke as first Government supporter in the afternoon's debate on the Address in Reply. Denying that he was either a "C.C.F.-er" or a Socialist, the member for Northumberland stressed the interdependence of capital, labor and agriculture, justifying in part the strikers in Stratford with the argument that "mass buying" eventually brought laborers into slavery.

W. G. Medd (Progressive, Huron South) and J. F. Strickland (Conservative, Peterboro' City) also made speeches "on the Reply."

Attacks Mass Buying.

Mr. McArthur supplemented a Conservative attack on Mitchell Hepburn and the Opposition with an expression of rural discontent with agricultural prices and a slashing criticism of mass buying. After likening the Ontario Liberal Leader to Absalom and describing the power of what he labelled "the despotic board of control of the Liberal Party," the member for Northumberland denounced the "abuse of capital, apparent in the country and in the Province," and told of less-than-cost prices in the tomato industry.

Referring to the strikers at Stratford as "men honestly on strike," Mr. McArthur outlined the method by which he claimed mass buyers caused manufacturers to cut overhead and wages until there resulted "firms entering into insolvency, laborers entering into slavery." Of the Stratford

strike the member for Northumberland declared: "The cause of the whole thing was that the men were agitated by anxiety almost into revolt."

Believes in Capitalism.

Twice Mr. McArthur reaffirmed his allegiance to capitalism. "I have no quarrel with capitalism," he declared, "but what I do quarrel with is the abuse of capitalism forcing men to enter into contracts that are unfair and unprofitable." Claiming that this abuse of capital was apparent in the Province, he stated that the mass buyers were only asked to be reasonable.

"There is another way of escape," the member said. The Stevens Commission he described as "one of the greatest things that has happened in this country." Responsibility rested

on the Conservative Party, Mr. McArthur said.

The member for Northumberland swung into his attack on mass buying after a more detailed review of the tomato situation. In this connection figures were cited purporting to show that one canning company in Canada paid in Northumberland County last year an average of 30 cents a bushel for tomatoes, and another one paid an average of 25 cents; the average cost of production and delivery to the cars had been 36 cents a bushel. "I am told that one of these great organizations made \$1,000,000 last year," he remarked. "I always like to hear of successful organizations, but I am not so pleased when they make the money out of the men who produced the product that enabled them to make the profit."

Hints at Investigation.

The member for Northumberland stated that the tomato packers of the Province had been asked to a conference "in order that we might discuss the industry in general and to ask for fair prices." He proposed "to promote an investigation of the whole organization if these men are not prepared to sit down with the growers to arrange a fair price."

Although taking exception to the Liberal appeal for lower interest rates, Mr. McArthur stated that the farmers are entitled to a living price to enable them to pay interest charges, taxes and legitimate expenses. "The farmers of this Province are beginning to waken up," he warned. "They're beginning to keep cost sheets and figure what it costs per bushel."

Three resolutions endorsed at the annual meeting of the Northumberland County Small Fruits and Canning Crops Association were presented by Mr. McArthur as a summing up of the tomato growers' problem. The first of these asked the Department of Trade and Commerce to consider the advisability of conducting a complete investigation of the operations of Canadian canning companies, and of the contracts and prices offered to growers, "it being our opinion that only by Government action can the producers expect to secure a satisfactory return for their crops." A rider asked for Federal legislation compelling the canning companies to record with the Government the extent of their carry-over each year.

In the second resolution the association recommended that both Federal and Provincial Government contracts for supplies of canned goods should be entered into with full insistence that such supplies are from companies paying the growers a fair price for raw products. The terms of the third, urged that the favor of the Governor-General as expressed in the advertised term, "By appointment to His Excellency the Governor-General," should be accorded only to business concerns operating on a basis of fair practices in their relation to the fruit and vegetable industry.