

REPORT on a MEETING of OFFICE BEARERS of
the SCOTTISH POTATO TRADE ASSOCIATION
with MR. BILL WALKER, Member of Parliament
for Perth and East Perthshire held at 19
George Street, PERTH at 10 a.m. on Saturday
26th JULY, 1980

PRESENT: Messrs. D. Hendry Lindsay (President), J.G.H. Fenton (Vice President) and
J.R. McArthur (Deputy Vice-President), with R. David Hunter (Secretary)
and D. Blackmore (Assistant) in attendance.

Following introductions by the Secretary, Mr. Walker stated he had considered the copies of the letter of 16th July, 1980 to the Minister of State for Agriculture (Lord Mansfield) (and almost identical letter having been sent to the Secretary of State for Scotland, Mr. George Younger on 23rd July, 1980,) and the Industrial Organisation and Development Act 1947, previously submitted to him.

Without taking any view of correctness or otherwise of the SPTA's opposition to the appointment of a Development Council for the Scottish Seed Potato Industry, he fully understood its concern over the methods used in the recent "poll" of all registered producers. In particular, he quoted the phrase "all non-replies were pre-determined as supportive" as being most telling in support of the SPTA's case.

Mr. Walker stated he was opposed in principle to "Quangos" and would give very careful scrutiny indeed to any increase in their number. He explained the Parliamentary procedure enabling him to lay an "Early Day Motion". Essentially this is a "blocking" procedure which, by bringing a matter out into the open and alerting other Members to its importance, also deterred the presentation (and "slipping through") of matters without full consideration. He undertook to lay such a motion at the first appropriate opportunity, based principally on the present extremely suspect consultative support for the proposal and pressing the SPTA's point that due weight be accorded to the views growers of substantial acreage whose numbers are small.

The SPTA representatives sought Mr. Walker's views on the best way for them to proceed in presentation of their objections. Mr. Walker felt the Association was on the right lines. The Ministers could not ignore the letters written to them and would have to reply. A Parliamentary Early Day Motion would give due indication that developments would be under Parliamentary scrutiny. This tended to make civil servants "twitchy", since this procedure could lead to the matter being referred to the Select Committee on Agriculture (on which Mr. David Myles, the member for Banff and himself a farmer, serves) (which has the power to call Mr. Lyall or the Minister himself to give evidence) and even to the powerful 1922 Committee of back-benchers. Meantime he agreed the SPTA should concentrate on preparing for being consulted by the Minister in terms of the Act. For his own part Mr. Walker also undertook to enlist support among other Scottish Members of Parliament. Mr. McArthur pointed out that his own Member is Mr. Nicholas Fairbairn Q.C. and Mr. Blackmore explained that in correspondence with Mr. Barr, Mr. Peter Fraser (the Member for Angus South) had promised Parliamentary Scrutiny of any Order laid.

Mr. Lindsay enquired the likely timetable and rate of progress of the application to appoint a Development Council which he understood had already been submitted. Mr. Walker pointed out that the Act empowers an Order to be made without a Parliamentary Vote. He felt it was most unlikely an Order would be laid in the current session of Parliament (which ends on 5th August) and he would be surprised if it were done without drafts first being laid.

Discussions/

Discussions having included references to the Apples and Pears Development Council and to NSDO it was arranged Mr. Walker would enquire as to the former and SPTA would furnish financial information on the latter. In conclusion Mr. Walker provided the telephone number of his private office (01-219-4449) at the House of Commons where he could be contacted (by leaving a message on the answering machine there in his absence) should any urgent developments occur.

In reply to Mr. Blackmore, Mr. Walker assured the representatives that, especially in the event that Scottish Members of Parliament were objecting to a purely Scottish Order, it would not receive approval by the numerical superiority of English Members.

The meeting then ended, with the representatives' thanks to Mr. Walker.