

REPORT on a MEETING between the
SCOTTISH POTATO TRADE ASSOCIATION
and the Potatoes Committee of the
NATIONAL FARMERS' UNION OF SCOTLAND
held at 17 Grosvenor Crescent, EDINBURGH,
at 2.30 p.m. on Wednesday, 8th FEBRUARY,
1984.

PRESENT: N.F.U.S. - Messrs. J.W. Hay and J.A. McLaren, with Mrs. J. Armstrong
in attendance.

S.P.T.A. - Messrs. J.E. Cook, K.A. McKenzie and J.R. McArthur, with
D. Blackmore in attendance.

Mr. J.W. Hay acted as Chairman.

DISCUSSION: Mr. Cook confessed to being considerably confused in respect of proposals to change the Potato Marketing Scheme. Conflicting reports have been received on all sides in very rapid succession. He explained that on the day following an Open Meeting of SPTA Council (on Thursday, 2nd February, 1984 at which the SPTA Membership had been afforded full opportunity to express its views on the NFUS' proposals), media comment had injected further uncertainty into the situation. In the morning of Monday, 6th February a meeting of the British Potato Trades Consortium (at which he and Mr. McKenzie had represented SPTA) had received reports of various alternative options. In particular, the report of a meeting of the Consortium's Messrs. Login and Scorer with Mr. Pooley (Chief Executive of the PMB) had indicated that no Government funding would be available and that any support scheme would have to be totally producer-financed. At the Joint Consultative Committee Meeting that same afternoon, the Potato Marketing Board had apologised for not being able to discuss the matter before a public announcement had been made. Following that Meeting, Mr. Cook had a private discussion lasting about an hour with Mr. D. Sinclair (Vice Chairman of the PMB), during which he was confidentially assured of the certainty of government support until 1990.

Mr. Hay accepted that SPTA had found difficulty in formulating its response to NFUS proposals against a background of such uncertainty. In his own explanation of that background Mr. Hay disclosed that the Unions and the PMB had still to resolve their different approaches before the imminent "crunch" meeting with government. Whereas the Unions had ceded an important principle to accommodate the government's call for limitation of its support liability, the PMB has clearly been more concerned to preserve its own privileged position and power. To this end the Board was continuing to discuss the eventual phasing out of all government support liability. This course was totally unacceptable to NFUS and Mr. Hay stated that unless the PMB can be persuaded to abandon it, he was prepared to resign from the (NFU/NFUS/PMB) Working Party.

That apart, it is also necessary to resolve Unions/PMB differences (a) in the allocation of proportional responsibilities within the proposed 500,000 tonnes of total support and (b) between actual contracts or a direct intervention system. The meeting discussed these points briefly.

For SPTA, Mr. Cook explained that although some parts of NFUS' proposals were not fully acceptable, such differences were not fundamental. It was clearly unproductive to try to resolve these in the present circumstances and SPTA would, therefore, confirm its intention not to pursue an independent course at this juncture.

The meeting thereupon concluded.