

Agriculture

[English]

The hon. member for Humber-St. George's-St. Barbe (Mr. Marshall)—Veterans Affairs; the hon. member for Comox-Alberni (Mr. Barnett)—Immigration; the hon. member for Grenville-Carleton (Mr. Baker)—Public Service.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker, may I say that there have been discussions, and I believe I can say there is agreement to postpone tonight's late show until some other night and use that extra half hour for this debate in order to get in a few more speakers. We may do other things as well, but at least there is agreement not to have the late show tonight.

Mr. Lang: Mr. Speaker, I would like to double-check as I understand that to the moment there is not that agreement.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Three out of four parties have agreed.

Mr. McKinley: Mr. Speaker, it would be our wish that this debate continue until 10.30 and that the late show be cancelled. It would also be our wish that later in the day we reduce the time for speeches to ten minutes because of the number of members who want to take part in the debate.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Laniel): The Chair does not see that there is unanimous consent. While hon. members carry on their discussions, and possibly reach agreement, the Chair will recognize the hon. member for Middlesex.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY**ALLOTTED DAY, S.O.58—STATE OF AGRICULTURAL ECONOMY UNDER GOVERNMENT POLICIES**

Mr. William C. Frank (Middlesex): Mr. Speaker, I rise as a member of the House who is very concerned about what this resolution implies, namely, the inability of the government to give consistent leadership in comprehensive and co-ordinated agricultural policies and programs.

Some hon. members, and possibly even some of the public on first thought, will question the practicability of this debate when, on the surface at least, most farmers, as the saying goes, never had it so good. But, Mr. Speaker, you will notice that I said "on the surface". I mean by this that unless the farming community can be assured that they will not once again be used as political footballs, then the profit-laden path so obvious now may once again deteriorate into a quagmire of below cost of production returns. As opposition members we have a responsibility forcibly to make the government more aware of this possibility than apparently it seems to be now.

As you are aware, Mr. Speaker, for some time now in the House I have pursued a line of questioning expressing

concern about what is happening in the beef industry, which could quite easily have long-range effects on the industry and also on the consumers who, of course, are everybody. As one example, just this week I asked the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) why a special cabinet meeting had not been called before last weekend in order to deal with the havoc to which our beef industry is being subjected at the present time. His answer was:

—cabinet meetings are called at my behest. The matter of time is one of internal administration. I call them as often as I find it necessary.

Time alone will tell if there should have been a temporary tariff placed on United States beef, both alive and dressed, entering the Canadian market. I am sure the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Whelan) would also like to know the answer. Then he would not have to be guessing again about which way to move. Personally, I think such a tariff should have been imposed two weeks ago when it was quite obvious what was taking place. However, what the Prime Minister emphatically made clear in his answer to me and, more important, to the Canadian farmer, is that agriculture did not rate as high in his books as another political game that was being played last week, and won by his party, in the adjoining province of Quebec.

We all know that the Minister of Agriculture is continually crisscrossing the country, trying to put the message across that not only does our agricultural industry need to be strong but emphasizing that the government does really care. I have to admit that his so-called "Whelanese" has been well accepted by most of the farming community. It reminds me a bit of the advertisement for dog food which says, "all you need to add is love". I can assure the government that the farmers are expecting a bit more than just love at the present time. However, after the answer the Prime Minister gave me it will be very difficult for the minister to convince the farmers this government sincerely does care about their long-term welfare.

● (1700)

Let me review quickly what has happened leading up to the present state of confusion within the beef industry. First of all, the Minister of Finance (Mr. Turner) lifted the one and a half per cent tariff on United States beef entering Canada. Later the U.S. beef producers restricted their supply to market because there was a temporary freeze at the processor level. This freeze meant the processor had a ceiling on the price at which he could sell the dressed product, which automatically set the price to the producer.

To beat this problem, U.S. beef was finding its way over here to be processed and then returned, which in turn had the effect of making our beef more attractive to the U.S. market and resulted in higher prices. Our government then imposed an embargo on the export of livestock and meat products. This caused considerable concern and a drop in prices to our own producers in Canada. The minister mentioned this afternoon in the House that it was not called an embargo but, whatever it was, the price went down in a hurry.

Next, the U.S. freeze at the processor level was lifted and opened up their home market. This encouraged heavy shipments which in turn depressed the U.S. home market.