

*Meat Import Act*

limit of the benefit. I would want to underscore the tremendous benefit in this legislation for the consumers of Canada.

**Mr. Baker (Nepean-Carleton):** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Malone:** The truth of the matter is that if there is a belief in Canada today that we are paying too much for our red meat or beef, then we need only look back to the period of time from 1973 to 1976 when we opened the flood gates for beef from New Zealand and Australia. The consumers of Canada then had the tremendous benefit of cheap meat without realizing the day of payment was coming. While they had the luxury of good cheap protein on their plates, the truth of the matter is they have now end up paying because the farmers have had to decrease their breeding herds to the extent we now have a shortage of breeding stock in the country.

There are a number of things I would like to say in commencing this speech. First of all, there has been some credit given to the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Whelan), who is present with us today for the consideration of this bill. I want to give him credit, too, for bringing the legislation to the House; but I am sure the minister will join with me saluting the hon. member for Medicine Hat (Mr. Hargrave) who took a very major part in drafting a similar piece of legislation for our party in that short period of time we were in the government through 1979. In many ways, what we have before us today is really a piece of legislation carried over from the previous government, and that has been mentioned previously.

While we endorse this piece of legislation and believe it will do a considerable amount of good in giving regulation to the inflow of red meats from the continent, the truth of the matter is that the amount of ministerial discretions, which is a change from the piece of legislation we introduced, is a change which I think has the potential for some dangerous politics in the beef industry.

I can easily foresee a period of time when we will have a situation, as we are going into an election, and recognizing that by far the majority of Canadians are housed in Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver—the large consumer markets—where the government of the day, irrespective of party, may be pressured into trying about food prices, making them cheaper and having ministerial discretion within that act. I think that is an unfortunate fact, because we could have better legislation with better protection for both consumers and producers, with greater security and sense of predictability, had we had a piece of legislation not allowing for that kind of ministerial discretion working towards the short-term benefit, but against the long-term gain for all of Canadians.

I also want to say I believe this piece of legislation will auger very well for us in future years. It will probably become ever-increasingly important as we get into that period of time some 20 or 30 years from now.

In this Parliament, at this time, the great debate in the country is on the constitution and energy. I submit that those issues will not have near the significance of the issues which we will be debating when the century turns. I am convinced that

the big debate—not just in this country, but in the world—will be on food production and food distribution.

We have a world situation today where every day 12,000 children under the age of five are dying from starvation, and where four-fifths of our world population suffers from malnutrition. An alarming figure of some 70 million people a year suffer from permanent and irreversible brain damage due to a lack of protein in their diets. Against those awesome figures is the fact that the world's population is increasing at a rate of some 77 million people every year. That is an alarming figure, when you stop to recognize that 77 million people is equivalent to three times the population of Canada. Every year that kind of population figure is added.

The reason I raise this at this time, in respect of a piece of legislation which deals with meat imports, is that, to a large extent meat will be a product that will gravitate back to its production from grasslands, at least to a greater degree than at the present time. I say this because of the fact that a human being can live on two pounds of cereal grain in his diet per day. He can also live on about two pounds of meat per day. However, it takes 18 pounds of grain to produce two pounds of meat. Therefore, with much of the black and good growing soils of the country in the years ahead there will be increasing pressure to move back into cereal production, human beings will be eating cereal foods, and meat will be treated more as a luxury. Because of that situation, this piece of legislation is important now. It will give stability and predictability to the industry. However, it is in the long run that this kind of legislation will have its greater sense of balance.

I noted that my good friend from the New Democratic Party, the hon. member for Humboldt-Lake Centre (Mr. Althouse) stated he was somewhat concerned that we live so close to the United States and felt some threat in the fact that it has ten times our population. I only want to say that for our farmers and ranchers, that should auger for nothing but good. As we produce in this country and recognize that we have a market ten times our domestic size that means a potential for holding the price in that area so our farmers and ranchers will be guaranteed some kind of an equitable income, with the provision that we are not opening the flood gates to Australia and New Zealand for the import of beef.

I want to just take a moment to disassociate myself from that. I believe if this legislation is passed, we should feel somewhat comforted that we will not again experience in the beef industry the situation we experienced in 1973 through to 1976, the results of which we are living with today, because the price of producing cattle was almost analogous to the Canadian mint production costs. Most people who have watched how to make a penny in Canada realize that it takes between two and 2.5 cents to produce a penny. That is what happened in the ranching industry from 1973 to 1976 it cost one more to produce an animal than what one was able to get when it was sold. Because of that fact, the farmers sold off large portions of their breeding stock.