

\$200,000, \$300,000, \$500,000 and \$800,000. The minister keeps saying and recognized today during the question period that this policy had given rise to many reactions, generally from people who are opposed to it. He confirmed that he received a request for the resignation of the three commissioners who sit on the board. This is an indication of a deep and very serious dissatisfaction. Is the minister aware of this situation? While his department's estimates are being considered, can he tell us if himself, his parliamentary secretary or his experts have a recipe to give us this afternoon, so that we might send it to our producers to show them how to pay their debts for which this government is responsible, because of its dairy policy?

Can the minister answer 30 or 40 complaints I have received for a week from farmers of my region who are about to put their farm up for auction, simply because they would give up farming. Mr. Chairman, this is a dramatic situation. The livelihood of these producers, the food of our people are at stake, a whole health system and marketing of our domestic production. Can the minister tell us where his interests lie? Do they lie in the import of cheddar and other milk by-products? Is he really the minister of Canadian producers so that he will assist them?

Is the minister in a position today to tell us whether when he is in the west he says the same things as in the east of the country? Mr. Chairman, we are Canadians or we are not. The minister says this to the western producers at some occasions: We have too much wheat, slow down your production and to this effect, here are subsidies to stop seeding; and in the east, the same minister not only imposes a ceiling but in addition to this he imposes a very hard penalty on those who produced too much. They produced too much because the government, with its short term policy, led them to organize themselves better.

I remember that since I have been sitting in this house, I heard this minister and his predecessor say that it is important to have a modern, well equipped agriculture and that milk producers should modernize their equipment, that they should put their herds under ROP control, that they should go into debt. That is what they did, Mr. Speaker. And now those people are penalized because they work. Can the minister advise the House this afternoon on the following matters: First, what suggestion has he to offer so that producers may live with this new policy? Can he tell them how to defer their payments to the farm credit union and on their instalments on farm machinery? Has he any answer? If so, Mr. Chairman, the debate is closed. If not, we must infer that the minister is wilfully accepting to let producers disappear because he has chosen to let the big get bigger and the small ones vanish.

Mr. Chairman, agriculture will never be viable in Canada if there is a policy for big producers which overlooks small ones. When I say "small ones" this may mean in some hon. members' minds a very small farmer with a couple of cows, but to me it means milk producers with \$200,000, \$300,000, \$400,000 or \$500,000 investments and who are now being penalized. To be honest, I must concede that the government is not the only one to blame. There are labour leaders at that level who have not been really honest with the producers and who did not always serve the cause of farm producers. Mr. Chairman, the minister is aware of that.

Business of Supply

There is also that famous problem of two kinds of production—whole milk and industrial milk. There is also that problem, namely passing the buck at the provincial and federal levels depending on circumstances, depending on whether it suits Ottawa and Quebec to get out of a discussion, some dialogue or some question period. I am quite aware of that, Mr. Chairman. I think the time has come to stop passing the buck between Ottawa and Quebec, to stop passing the buck to unions also by saying, well, integrate your production of natural and industrial milk. Let us have a policy of extensive consultation and a long term policy. That is what producers want to know.

At present, Mr. Chairman, they are not overly worried about prices but they would like to know indeed what they will be faced with tomorrow morning. I could read to this minister this afternoon 30 to 40 letters of protest by people who are utterly confused, no longer have any hope for tomorrow working independently on their own farms since they are entirely disadvantaged by that policy.

The Chairman, I hope quite sincerely without any political partisanship that the minister will consider those issues which I may be expressing in violent terms but which reflect exactly the requests of my fellow citizens in Lotbinière who are very concerned—there are thousands of them in my riding—but also those of incalculable producers across Quebec in that situation.

Mr. Chairman, we do not have the right in our conscience as a Parliament and a government to let things go, to impose the dairy policy that was announced belatedly for that matter and, Mr. Chairman, we do not have the right to let that policy be implemented without ensuring an honest living and an equitable income for the number of hours, the work and the investment put in. If not, Mr. Chairman, it will demonstrate once for all that agriculture is not considered important by this government but I am not convinced yet. I wish the minister would tell his views on that matter and again I repeat the question: As long as the minister will be there, will he continue to deceive us by using short term policies from year to year or will he agree some day to give us a long term policy?

Mr. Chairman, I remind the House that last year, that same minister announced with a great fanfare a supposedly extraordinary long term policy to deal with that problem once for all. It did not even last a year. It lasted exactly nine months. And then the threat of a false overproduction was revealed by the statistics on foreign products importation and producers began to worry.

We have no right to abandon our fellow citizens in such a situation when they made so many efforts, sacrifices and investments. Not many Canadians work so hard, so intensively with so many hours of work than dairy producers. I do not compare them with other producers but those people have guts and certainly deserve more than a kick in the pants for all their work and their efforts.

● (1640)

[English]

Mr. Whelan: Mr. Chairman, quite a bit has been said about the dairy industry. As I have said before in this House, the hon. member for Elgin is usually very constructive in his suggestions, but I hope he has chastised the hon. member for Brome-Missisquoi, who I believe is the con-