

Government Orders

What we are going to see is this legislation gradually undermining the authority of the Canadian Chicken Marketing Agency, as stated in its letter to every member of the standing committee two days after the meeting in which these amendments were put. The government came out steadfastly opposing it, thereby weakening the National Farm Products Marketing Act.

I think that it is simply a travesty if the GATT negotiations fail. They do not seem to be going very well, but we hope that they will. There is only one narrow window there for the government to recover what it gave away in the Canada-U.S. free trade deal. In that negotiation it gave up the right of import controls. The Americans kept their import controls under the 1954-55 GATT waiver. Canada negotiated an agreement where they are going to remove the tariffs on processed dairy products and processed other products. They have identified I think 17 forms of chicken which are not considered chicken for the terms of import controls.

What we are seeing here is a government that is slowly and gradually undermining the supply management system which has been so useful and which has provided stability and security to the Canadian agriculture industry. That is why we had 40,000 farmers here on the Hill.

Motion No. 2 really provides that the initiative for the establishment of an agency for a check-off for the promotion of an agriculture commodity must come from the farmers. It cannot just come from the government itself as existing legislation proposes.

I am extremely distressed that the government has not seen fit to even allow debate on Motion No. 1. I hope that Motion No. 2 will carry because we believe that the initiative for the establishment of these agencies should come from producers and not from the government. After all, it will be the producers who, at the end of the day, have to pay for these check-offs.

Mr. Vic Althouse (Mackenzie): Mr. Speaker, we have a number of motions that have been lumped for debate here today at the report stage of Bill C-54, an act to amend the Farm Products Marketing Agencies Act and other acts in consequence thereof.

The bill is attempting to set up a procedure under the Farm Products Marketing Act which would permit the collection by various commodity groups of levies for

conducting research into marketing for promotion of the product. We have seen a number of such agencies proliferate in some of the provinces of Canada. Quite frankly, some of them are not that efficient. They collect a lot of money, but the money does not get directed to promotion and research. A big chunk of the money is eaten up by the collecting organization for what they call administration fees.

What is even more ironic is that often these organizations barely existed before getting the right to run a check-off on a certain commodity. The administration fees are largely spent in promoting the organization itself, rather than the product that was supposed to be the purpose of collecting the fees.

I want to have the House of Commons set some rules which were not stated in the original draft of the legislation. Since this is our last chance to amend the legislation, I want to do it here. Motion No. 6, for instance, points out that the levies that are charged on a commodity shall not be in excess of one half of 1 per cent of the value of the regulated product in respect of which the levies or charges apply. In other words, it limits the amount of levy that can be charged on a product that farmers are marketing and it says that the agency that is trying to collect the money can go up to one half of 1 per cent of the value of the product as it is sold at the farm gate.

I think that is a reasonable amount. If government members would like to come up with a better figure, they can do so. I would hope they would do that rather than simply leave it wide open to the discretion of some future minister of the Crown.

Another thing that Motion No. 7 does in the same manner, providing some direction to these agencies that are established under this legislation, is point out that at least 80 per cent of all such levies or charges collected by the agency each year shall be expended to promote the marketing or production of the regulated product, et cetera. In other words, I do not want to see federal legislation and federal agencies established which end up only collecting money from farmers to promote an organization rather than to get out and do the promotion of the product and do the research that they claimed was the reason for collecting the money in the first place.