

*Slaughter of Calves*

going to market at the rancher level, at the cow-calf level, at the grass-fed level, such as those in my riding and in much of British Columbia. If the industry is to be sustained, stabilization must be at the level of the basic herd. We are in danger of losing much of the basic herd in Canada. The hon. member for Kamloops-Cariboo told us about the ups and downs of the rancher and the low prices he is getting. Mr. Speaker, I submit that producers today, particularly young farmers, will not stand for this kind of treatment. They want the same kind of treatment that is given to people in the urban areas. They want stability.

Tonight there has been a call for an inquiry; I have even heard a royal commission mentioned. I assume what is meant is an inquiry into the price of beef at the consumer level. We already have the Food Prices Review Board. Is this not what it was set up to do? Certainly it is costing the taxpayers of Canada a great deal of money. I think that the members of that board have done this. I would not want to say for sure that they have, but they certainly should have if they have not.

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Over the years, on many occasions, the same type of plea was made for inquiries or royal commissions. Actually I do not think there has ever been a time when any complete inquiry or information has proved that there was anything wrong at the higher level. Let us ask the Food Prices Review Board; they should be able to tell us quickly if there is, Mr. Speaker.

It is at the producer level that the problem which has provoked this debate tonight has arisen. Ten cents a pound for beef at the producer level is a lot of money. It is not the same amount of money when you go up the chain. So I do not think that what we want is an inquiry or a royal commission inquiring into the meat industry. What we need is some concrete action by the government to look after the over-production and to ensure that the producer is making a living.

**Mr. Lorne Nystrom (Yorkton-Melville):** Mr. Speaker, I must say, first of all, that I am happy to see the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Whelan) back in the House tonight, awake, alert and alive. I think that the type of speech he gave tonight was the first one for him. I have never seen him so excited, nervous and emotional as he was in the House tonight. I must admit that in rhetoric and oratorical style it was one of the liveliest I have ever heard him make. But let us digest what he said.

What did the minister say? He said nothing at all. All he did was catalogue what he has done in the past for the beef industry. All of us know what has happened to the beef industry since he took office. But he did not say a thing about what he would do now to alleviate the situation. He said he would be making a statement in the House this week about his new program. I ask through you, Mr. Speaker: why did he not make that statement tonight? Is that all the sympathy he has for the cattle producers and consumers in this country?

The minister did not tell us a thing tonight. All he managed was to do a lot of politicking and to spout a lot of rhetoric. He has a reputation for doing a lot for farmers but, so far as I am concerned, he has not done anything at

[Mr. Whittaker.]

all for farmers except to spout rhetoric from one end of the country to the other. The time has come when the minister had better start delivering in the House.

The four provincial governments, Quebec and the three prairie governments, have all recognized that there is a crisis in the beef industry today, and they have all tried to do something within their own limited means. But the Minister of Agriculture has been very critical of them and cynical about them. He said that they have not done enough, that they have not done the right thing, and that they are fighting among each other.

I have discovered today, talking to one of the officials in one of the provinces, that the minister and his officials have not even spoken to the provinces for the last four weeks about the problems and policies in the beef and livestock industry. Is this a crisis, or is it not a crisis? Do we have a problem, or do we not? I should like the minister to answer some of these questions, but he did not see fit to do so tonight when he spoke to the House, and made the dramatic appeal to us to understand the point of view of what he thinks is the best Minister of Agriculture that the country has ever had.

The time has come to do something for the cow-calf operator, something which in the long run will benefit the consumer also.

**Mr. Whelan:** The government of Saskatchewan did not do anything.

**Some hon. Members:** Oh, oh!

**Mr. Nystrom:** The minister speaks about the government of Saskatchewan. Let me tell him that they put more money into the cattle industry than this government is doing right now. At least we in Saskatchewan have a cash advance program. The Saskatchewan government is trying to do something, as are Quebec, Manitoba and Alberta. There is need for federal action. It takes money to stabilize the industry, and you must do that at the federal level, not through the various provincial governments.

There is a crisis. What we saw on television last night was something that I am sure all of us deplore. We saw 600 head of cattle slaughtered by farmers. That has never happened in this country before. We have never seen anything like it before. I am sure everybody in this country deplored what happened. But why do we not look at some of the reasons why it occurred?

Why did farmers decide, all of a sudden, to take cattle that they raised and fed in the last few months and slaughter them, one every 30 seconds? The reason is that cattle are hardly worth selling because the price has dropped drastically on the market in the last few months. Prices are down by one third to one half of what they were a year ago. In my riding in Saskatchewan this last week end I spoke to many farmers who had sold cows for eight cents a pound, cows that were at an age when they should be bred and produce calves next spring. Yet, farmers were selling out and depleting their herds. Calves are going for less than 25 cents, some for 10 cents or 15 cents a pound. One cannot find buyers.

When something like that happens, it is a crisis—a serious crisis. Who will benefit? No one will benefit except