

—according to information I have received today most people still have some stocks of grain and there is no real loss of feed stocks. That is, no livestock or poultry are going without feed. We are watching the situation very closely—

So on April 8 the situation was being watched closely. On April 10 his tune changed. Somebody told him what was going on and he said, "There will be some loss of poultry and livestock." He admitted the problem was serious. But even now, seven days afterwards, we still do not see any plan of action for coming to the aid of these people who are among those in Canada least equipped to help themselves when caught in a conflict between agencies of size. They face problems which literally can mean the end of their livelihood, the end of their capacity to carry on.

Let me refer to the acting prime minister, and I underline the word "acting".

**An hon. Member:** As a noun, or a verb?

● (0010)

**Mr. Clark (Rocky Mountain):** Of course, it is a moment of glory for any members of parliament from Quebec to sit on the government side, generally in anonymity. There is an opportunity for any of them, perhaps by flipping a coin. Perhaps if it were by the loudest voice the hon. member for Hamilton Mountain (Mr. MacFarlane) would prevail. There is an opportunity tonight for any of them to be acting Prime Minister. The actor acting as Prime Minister on April 10 declined to answer because mediation efforts were then under way. That was eight days after they had broken down.

This indicates the degree to which the government keeps track of what is going on in this matter. It might be of so little importance to it that no minister of the cabinet is here now and only two showed up for the debate, but this is a very great concern to the people of Quebec who are directly affected. They are caught in the squeeze between these agencies of size against which they individually cannot compete.

All of us who come from or have any knowledge of agricultural matters know the urgency with which this problem must be addressed. We know the problem that faces the farmers of Quebec. They now face the prospect of having to try to get by without feed, having to kill cattle prematurely, and undermining what little chance for profit they now have.

This is clearly a case where simple compassion should cause the government to move to action quickly. However, we have gone on since the hon. member for Joliette raised this matter two weeks ago. Literally nothing has been done. The government has not even kept itself up to date on developments in the matter, and no minister is here tonight to explain what the government might contemplate doing.

The point has been made—I know it does not need repetition, but I will say it one more time—that governments are elected to do certain jobs. They are elected to exercise responsibility. It is not enough for someone in the back bench of the government party to shout across the floor, "What would you do?". The point is that for whatever reasons or whatever justification, the government

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was elected to serve as a government. It was elected to assume responsibilities, not to shunt them off.

The point that is particularly ironic tonight is that the government was elected almost primarily because of the support of people in a province toward whose interests it has cast a blind eye for the past two weeks. That is terrible.

**An hon. Member:** Don't be partisan.

**Mr. Clark (Rocky Mountain):** I am advised by a member opposite not to be partisan. I am not being partisan. If it is partisan to suggest that a government, once elected, has the responsibility to act, then I am being partisan. That is a simple statement of the responsibility of government. It perhaps should not be surprising that that comes as something of a revelation to members on the other side. They either sit in silence or simply pound their desks despite the failure of the government ministers to show up for a debate, let alone come to the aid of people whose votes, support and confidence are the single reason why many members opposite are here. Those people must be asking themselves what was involved when they vested that confidence in members opposite who have shown so little concern for their condition that it required the hon. member for Joliette and the hon. member for Bellechasse to cause this debate tonight, which is proceeding without the participation and apparently without the interest of ministers of the Crown, particularly those most directly responsible.

The government has the responsibility to act, not to pass things off to other parties or agencies, and not to duck. The Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Whelan), who should be in the centre of the action, is not here. He at least sent an excuse. The Minister of Labour did not do that. The Prime Minister is not here. The Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs (Mr. Ouellet), the new chief in Quebec, fled after making a speech. He did not dare stay to try to defend it. None are here. However, these are the people responsible for carrying out the responsibilities vested in them by the very people whose problems brought us to a debate in the House of Commons at 17 minutes after midnight on a night that most of us expected to have off. It is perhaps worth noting that while many members chose to come here and debate this question, the Prime Minister, the Minister of Agriculture and the Minister of Labour took the night off. That is shameful.

When the parliamentary secretary intervened earlier he said that certain matters were being considered. As I understood him, the government is considering the possibility of some sort of rail transport and other options. Why so late? Why did consideration of those matters not begin when my colleague from Joliette raised the question in the House of Commons? Why has there been a delay which has caused such uncertainty and many problems for so many people from the province which elected most members across the way?

The government has a clear responsibility to act in a way which will help these people, numbered among the people less capable because of their lack of forceful organization. As the elected Government of Canada it has a responsibility to help them in a country that is increasingly dominated by agencies of size.