

Supply

and dealt, I think quite adequately, with this Government's very positive, prompt and responsible handling of the western Canadian drought situation.

When we broke at one o'clock I was making some comments that would again set the record straight with reference to the impression that, intentionally or otherwise, the Right Hon. Leader of the Opposition was attempting to leave, to lay all the blame for the difficulties that we have in the agri-food industry at this particular time totally and completely on the doorstep of this Government, when in fact that is not the case. I think we have acted responsibly for the last 13 months. We have passed more agricultural legislation in this House in the last eight months that we were sitting than the previous Government did in the previous eight years. We have taken well over 100 initiatives totalling nearly \$2 billion. They are on the public record for people to examine, and no doubt other speakers on both sides of the House will utilize that list to make some further comments.

I want to make the observation that back in the early 1970s—and I need not remind the House that we were not in government at that time—the experts in the agri-food industry were meeting here in Canada, in North America and other locations throughout the world. They were doing some predictions and some crystal ball gazing as to what the future of the agri-food industry would be.

Collectively they came to the conclusion, looking ahead into the late 1970s and through the 1980s and perhaps beyond, that certain situations were going to exist. Collectively they came to the conclusion that interest rates would remain stable, and of course they were wrong. They indicated that energy prices would remain stable, and they were wrong again. They indicated that in-farm input costs would remain stable, and time has indicated of course that they were wrong in that observation as well. They indicated that during the late 1970s and on through the 1980s farm commodity prices would reach an all-time high. We all know that commodity prices have seldom, if ever, been much lower than they are at the moment. They also indicated that, as far as the North American and the international supply of food commodities was concerned, we would be going through probably a decade or a decade and a half of commodity and food shortages. Indeed, they have been wrong on that count as well because we are going through a time here in Canada and throughout the North American continent and in some of the major food producing countries of the world when we are not in a decade of shortages but rather in a decade of surpluses. Although we have certain market mechanisms which do help to establish better commodity prices, it is still difficult. Most are dealt with on the supply and demand principle.

So previous Governments were involved in these observations and they were involved in supporting these conclusions. They were also involved, particularly the federal Government, and there are many examples with respect to that. I do not have anything against my predecessor. I have known him for a long time. However, if there is any question in anyone's mind and they want to go back and read his speeches they will see

that in those speeches he indicated these would be great times, that input costs would remain stable and that commodity prices would be high. On behalf of the Government he was urging people to increase investment and to expand production. He said that there would be great things in store for those people who did.

● (1410)

I want to make those observations because part of the recommendation was supported quite enthusiastically—not quietly but quite openly and publicly—during that period of time with respect to what conditions would be like during the late 1970s and 1980s. Unfortunately, some very inaccurate and unfortunate messages were sent out to the agri-food industry by the previous Government during that period of time. This has resulted in some very serious situations for a large number of Canadian farmers.

Another comment made by the Right Hon. Leader of the Opposition was quite unfair. If he knew the facts he probably would not have made the comment. He made some reference to the action the Government has taken with respect to imports of heavily subsidized EEC beef. I was rather startled by his comment. I believe he said that we were responsible for tripling or quadrupling EEC beef imports into the country, or something of that nature. That is just not the case. I would like to take the hon. gentleman back and remind him that his Government did nothing, and he was Prime Minister at the time when, in fact, no action whatsoever was taken. As a result of no action being taken, beef imports from the EEC countries flowed into Canada to the extent of some 50 million pounds. The year prior there was about 13 million pounds imported into the country, while two years prior to that time the level of imports was at about one million pounds. If there was any irresponsibility it certainly was not on the part of this Government but rather on the part of the previous Government during a time in which the Right Hon. Leader of the Opposition was Prime Minister of the country. No action was taken at all, and that is a fact.

We indicated that if we were elected we would invoke meat import legislation. We were elected and we invoked that legislation. We invoked it on December 21, a year ago, and negotiated a settlement with the EEC so that this year a maximum of 23 million pounds of heavily subsidized beef will be imported into the country. That is an amount less than half of what was shipped into the country last year. That is not a case of turning our backs on the beef industry but rather of accepting our responsibilities and providing some leadership and some control on these imports.

I have seen other comments, not by the Leader of the Official Opposition, but comments reported in the farm press across the country to the effect that beef, in excess of some 300 million pounds, will be imported into the country. That is complete nonsense and it is completely inaccurate. We said that we would invoke the law and we did. We negotiated a settlement with the EEC with respect to 23 million pounds as compared to 50 million pounds last year. Had we not invoked