

Adjournment Debate

the marketing system of beef in this country. That is over a year ago and nothing has happened. He told us about a year and a half ago in committee that he has a plan in his back pocket but nothing has happened.

What I find very discouraging, Mr. Speaker, is that there has been no legislation of any kind in this session concerning this industry. All we have had is the tabling of a Bill to increase cash advances. We on this side would support that, but the Minister does not appear to have enough influence with his House Leader to have the legislation brought forward for debate. In fact, the only initiative taken by this Government in agriculture was about two weeks ago when the Farm Credit Corporation increased interest rates on loans. However, there have been a couple of initiatives from this side.

The Hon. Member for Vegreville (Mr. Mazankowski) moved a motion concerning the reduction of tax on farm fuels. That motion was referred to the committee. The Hon. Member for Bruce-Grey (Mr. Gurbin) moved a motion concerning the agri-bond concept, and that as well went to committee. So we have an opposition which has taken the initiative to try and reduce some of the problems in agriculture in this country, yet the Government has done nothing.

It seems to me, Mr. Speaker, that if a Minister is in favour of doing something and the Opposition supports him and he still cannot get it done, one must wonder what kind of support the Minister has in his own caucus for the things he wants to do. I refer to support, but the Government does not appear to make up its mind on what it is prepared to do.

Let me say again that we are prepared to support legislation establishing a red meat stabilization program on the basis of the press release issued by the Government in October, 1983, but we have to see the legislation. We have to get it through second reading, into committee, and then back to the House for third reading. There are only a limited number of days available until the end of June, I think something over 30 days. If we do not have that legislation fairly quickly nothing is going to happen. It is true that there are some concerns about it in the industry, but there has never been a better time to move in so far as prices are concerned. This is the time to do some of these things, not when you get into a crisis situation as we did in 1974 and 1975 with very low prices. This is the time to make some decisions and have the people who are affected come forward with some recommendations on what they want to see in this legislation. We cannot support phantom legislation. We must have legislation introduced as far as the House is concerned.

● (1815)

In closing, I suggest that anything the Government can do to bring forward this legislation to give us a chance to debate it before the end of June will be looked upon very favourably by our side. If we do not see this legislation, we will have to question whether the Government is at all sincere in addressing any of the concerns which Canadian agriculture presently has.

[Translation]

Mr. André Bachand (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Agriculture): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to reply to the question which the Hon. Member for Portage-Marquette (Mr. Mayer) has raised concerning the establishment of the so-called tripartite red beef stabilization program. For nearly a decade the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Whelan) and his provincial counterparts have been trying to set up such a program.

First of all, Mr. Speaker, let me advise Hon. Members of the events which have taken place since the federal and provincial ministers of Agriculture met last summer in Prince Edward Island.

In Prince Edward Island, the provinces which are the larger red meat producers, namely, Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta, had agreed to examine together with the federal government a new program based on certain principles. On this basis, stabilization plans were developed and submitted last October to ministers and officials at a meeting held right here in Ottawa. Then, a series of meetings were organized with associations of producers and provincial governments to try and improve these plans. At a federal-provincial meeting which took place in Ottawa on February 9, further improvements were made. Thanks to these consultations, we now have an interim program which is being supported by the larger red meat producing provinces, by four provincial hog marketing boards, and by the Canadian Cattlemen's Association. This program has been discussed by the Minister of Agriculture and his Cabinet colleagues who have approved the main provisions of the bill that they want to introduce in the House to set up a voluntary tripartite red beef stabilization program.

We hope that the bill now being drafted will receive the approval of the House and will be passed before we adjourn for the summer.

The Minister of Agriculture could then reach an agreement with his provincial counterparts when they meet in Winnipeg next July. Thereby, Canadian red meat producers could have a much needed program before the end of the year. This program will not merely be helping individual farmers, but it will also help put an end to the proliferation of stabilization programs which has resulted in a balkanization of the industry.

To summarize, Mr. Speaker, we have gained the approval of Cabinet on the bill now being drafted and we would like these amendments to the Agricultural Stabilization Act to be accepted before Parliament adjourns for the summer so that firm agreements may be signed with the Provinces as early as next July.