

• (1835)

The problem also is that farmers, although they account for a great deal of our country's total production and expertise, make up only about 3 per cent of the Canadian population, a very small proportion indeed. This only creates another problem, the fact that governments neglect agriculture.

I have the impression that consumers generally take food for granted in Canada. They do not take the time to appreciate how important this industry is to the country. My hon. colleague from Essex—Windsor said a few days ago that a country that cannot feed itself soon will not be a country. Self-sufficiency is an important, even fundamental, consideration.

The other problem is once again that the media in Canada are not very interested in agriculture, again because it is not fashionable. The media are more concerned about urban problems than they are about rural problems. Agriculture is therefore much neglected. And consequently, governments neglect this industry as well. That is obvious. My God, is it obvious!

The throne speech makes no mention whatsoever of agriculture. It is an obvious oversight. Fifteen years ago, I worked for Eugene Whelan when he was the Minister of Agriculture in the Trudeau Cabinet. I never learned so much about agriculture as I did then. Mr. Whelan was a great minister, maybe even the most important Minister of Agriculture in the history of Canada, and even he had a very hard time convincing his colleagues of the importance of this industry. Moreover, the Trudeau government was doing nothing, zilch, to help agriculture. Well, maybe it was doing something, but only the bare minimum.

I feel that nothing much has changed in the intervening years, even if we have changed governments. We had a Conservative government in power and now we have a Liberal government, with a Prime Minister who was a member of that very same Cabinet years ago.

Mr. Trudeau himself displayed open contempt for farmers. I remember very clearly one time when we were in Winnipeg where farmers had gathered to confront him about the grain export crisis in the West. The grain was not moving and they wanted to know what the Prime Minister was going to do to help them. I remember what Mr. Trudeau said to them: "Sell your own goddam grain"!

Which only goes to show that Prime Minister Trudeau had no patience when it came to agricultural issues. I think that the current Prime Minister also has a tendency to neglect, and dare I say it, to misunderstand, this industry. The recent GATT talks will have a major impact on the entire agricultural sector in Quebec and Ontario, including the supply management system.

### The Address

The dairy and farming sectors work with quotas and the GATT talks jeopardized the value of these quotas.

Quotas, by the way, account for approximately two thirds of the value of a farm. The Prime Minister of Canada was asked if the farmers who stood to lose as a result of the fallout from the GATT negotiations would be compensated. The Prime Minister's answer was no, because they had not paid for their quotas. His exact answer was: "There will be no compensation for farmers because they did not buy their quotas."

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This is the statement made in French by the Prime Minister in an interview published by *Le Droit*, and I might add that this statement was not mentioned by the English Canadian press. I mention this minor detail, because it is nevertheless an important one: I am telling you that the Prime Minister's statement was only reported in French. Obviously, the Prime Minister was wrong about the quotas, because we know for a fact that farmers paid for their quotas and they paid dearly. In fact, this is the very basis of the borrowings they make. It is the basis of their credit. It is the basis of many very important things for farmers.

All these factors, which I mention very briefly, illustrate that in fact this government has no constructive and positive policies for the agricultural sector. This government does not have a vision for agriculture. In fact, Canada has never had a constructive vision for that sector. The truth is that our agricultural policy is nothing but a stopgap measure which has always been influenced by the Americans and the international community.

No initiatives are taken by Canada; we only react. The recent developments with GATT, the current situation and the agreements which are being negotiated with the Americans are blatant illustrations of this lack of vision for the agricultural sector in Canada. The facts prove that we only react. Right now, the situation is complex and worrisome for farmers, not only in the East but also in the West. Wheat production in the Prairies is second to none. We have a lot of durum wheat and other grain in the West, and Americans want to restrict exports to their country. It is true that exports have increased considerably since last year and the years before that. Wheat is very important for Western farmers, and Americans want to restrict that export.

When you think of it, Americans have no reason to do that. We signed a free trade agreement with them. The very basis of that agreement is to promote trade with Americans, including wheat, and now they want to be bad sports. They want to force Canada to restrict its exports. Once again, Canada is on its knees. It seems that we cannot, through the Minister of Agriculture, defend our rights and protect what is ours. Western farmers should be allowed to export as much wheat as they want to the