

*Feed Grain*

As far as we are concerned, it is a principle and, moreover, a rule of conduct. I hope it will be a guideline which we will follow every time the common good, the rules, the respect of the law, of the rules of democracy, of the government and of Parliament are involved, all of which in a living and thriving democracy, ably and courageously led through all the difficulties that we are experiencing.

The difference is that some members may speak for a long time still, and as far as we are concerned, we have the duty to act in due time and we will.

But, if we agree to speak about it, we will continue to listen, then, as proof of our seriousness, I hope we will strike a balance. We will find that the people were right in electing us, because what is important is action, and we shall take it.

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**Mr. Joe Clark (Rocky Mountain):** Mr. Speaker, I am the first member from the Prairie provinces to take part in the emergency debate tonight. As my friend from Lotbinière (Mr. Fortin) said, western Canada suffered from serious problems in the free movement of farm produce. When problems such as those, or others such as the oil crisis, arise, the members of western Canada, of our party, intervenes to speak for the interests of our voters. But when problems affect the province of Quebec, where are the Liberal members? Hon. members from the Conservative party and the NDP are the ones who request an emergency debate.

This matter is of the utmost importance, especially for the Quebec farmers. That is why one is amazed to note the absence this morning of the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Whelan) and that of the French-speaking ministers from Quebec, except for the Minister who has provincial ambitions in Quebec.

So, where is the Minister of Agriculture? The hon. member for Papineau told us the Minister of Agriculture had an appointment outside Parliament. I should like to point out that my colleague from Joliette (Mr. La Salle) also had an appointment in Montreal, but that he excused himself in order to be here tonight, or rather this morning.

The glaring absence of the Minister of Agriculture and Quebec ministers proves to what extent the government takes for granted the support it got from the Quebecers in the last election, and how lightly it takes a problem that strikes at the very heart of life in Quebec.

This shows very clearly that the Quebec population has no guarantee that in casting such a massive vote for the Liberals its interest will be secured for all that. Quite the contrary. It seems the more members from Quebec the Liberal party gets, the less they care for their province.

[English]

The problem we are discussing tonight, Mr. Speaker, is particularly acute for the farmers of Quebec who face immediate and practical problems. These are people who, as all in this House know, are not organized with the same strength as companies, unions and other strong agencies in society. They are people who do not have protection against agencies of size and strength. The problems which these people must face, whether they are problems to do with the weather or of the kind they are facing at present,

[Mr. Tessier.]

can literally cripple them in their operations, in their capacity to continue in agriculture and to keep on doing what they have been doing. They have no strike pay to fall back on, no corporate profit to support them.

These people are virtually without protection; their only protection is an appeal to parliament when they are caught up in a dispute with organized agencies of size in the country. Representatives of these farmers have come to members of the House of Commons on all sides. They obtained an active response at least from my colleagues, the hon. member for Bellechasse (Mr. Lambert) and the hon. member for Joliette (Mr. La Salle), in that an emergency debate was forced this evening.

We heard from the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs (Mr. Ouellet), that sudden, emergency minister of agriculture—I presume on the government side they choose an acting minister of agriculture by flipping a coin—a good deal of nonsense when he intervened in the debate, before he fled. I can understand his leaving suddenly after delivering the kind of speech that we heard.

**An hon. Member:** At nine o'clock this evening.

**Mr. Clark (Rocky Mountain):** As my colleague points out, that minister left at nine o'clock this evening. He suggested there was feed grain at Prescott and all that farmers need to do is go and get it. He suggested there was grain at Montreal. Surely the facts placed before the House must be known even to this instant minister of agriculture from metropolitan Montreal. Surely he knows that in Montreal the practice has been established amongst dealers of serving their own customers first. That does not help people in need in other parts of Quebec. Surely the minister must know that the cost of transportation, if those farmers were to go to Prescott, would be serious, particularly for people who are operating on low incomes, low margins and face great problems.

That minister ought to know, unless he has travelled all his life on pavement in Quebec, that we are in the midst of a season when in that province certain kinds of travel on certain roads is banned and it is not possible for trucks to travel on those roads because of the heavy weights involved. When he says there is feed grain at Prescott, he might as well say the farmers should go to Saskatoon, to Rio de Janeiro or other places to which it is practically impossible for them to go. That is the kind of nonsense he spoke tonight. I say it is no wonder, having made that kind of speech, that he left at nine o'clock.

The point which must be driven home concerns the responsibility of the government, a government elected largely with the support of those people whose problem now occupies the attention of this House. The problem was referred to by my colleague from Joliette and by the hon. member for Bellechasse. It is not a sudden problem, not a surprise problem. My colleague from Joliette raised the matter in the House two weeks ago. The government knew about the problem: it knew that a problem existed for people singularly ill-equipped to deal with the kind of difficulties they are now facing. Yet even as recently as a few days ago the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Whelan) did not know what was going on. On April 8, replying to a question from my side of the House, as recorded on page 4593 of *Hansard* he said: