

The Address—Mr. Fortin

deal with my own rather than caring for the four surrounding constituencies. So I wish a lot of courage to my colleague from Sherbrooke, in order that he may convince his colleagues from surrounding constituencies.

Mr. Speaker, a sentence especially struck me in the Speech from the Throne: "It is necessary both to deal with its (inflation) causes and to mitigate its effects".

That's a sentence we heard here before in 1969, 1970, 1971, 1972 and 1973. And now we hear it again: deal with the causes, mitigate the effects. Liberals are very consistent. That is, they often repeat what they would like to do. But when it comes to inflation, Mr. Speaker, the government is always at a loss to come up with a real remedy.

On the one hand, he tells us, production must be increased. That is obvious. There is a commodity shortage in many areas, and the shortage results in higher prices, and higher prices result in an economic imbalance for the consumer. I will give but one example. I will not try to discover obvious truths, as the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Whelan) said this afternoon, that he could not keep a hen from laying eggs when the rooster is well fed. Only he could invent such a theory. But, Mr. Speaker, I would remind this same minister, however brilliant—

Mr. Béchard: Roosters were needed.

Mr. Fortin: Roosters were needed, particularly in Bonaventure-Îles-de-la-Madeleine. Mr. Speaker, I will recall for him something that happened in my riding along the south shore of the St. Lawrence River. I was coming back from my office in Sainte-Croix and I stopped in Saint-Pierres-Becquets which is, as everybody knows, a tomato kingdom. There you find little stands along the road, and the garden is in the back. The tomatoes are freshly picked from the garden and put in those little stands. I stopped and asked my fellow citizen to sell me a basket of tomatoes. He was asking \$1.25 for the biggest one. There were actually 21 tomatoes in that basket. So that cost me \$1.25. He was satisfied, he had found an opportunity to work and profit. He was satisfied and happy with his sale and his work.

Two weeks later, my wife went to the Dominion Store to buy some of those famous tomatoes. The store was asking \$1.23 for seven small tomatoes wrapped in a cellophane stamped "Dominion". That was two weeks later, Mr. Speaker. Then we are told that the inflation problem cannot be solved. It was not because that tomato grower had no guts, it was not because he did not have a good product to sell. For that matter, Mr. Speaker, it is not because consumers do not have needs to meet.

If there is a problem of increase in the cost of living, that is in our opinion due for a large part—and I say this though I am an eager defender of private enterprise—to businesses that monopolize increasingly the market, that accumulate stores and then, by creating shortages, increase their prices and thus exploit the consumer to the knowledge of the government. There are many reasons for which I cannot accept this, Mr. Speaker, that those large companies should exploit the situation creating shortages, and exploiting the consumer through exorbitant prices.

[Mr. Fortin.]

Those large companies, which are called private, harm the small businesses. In a few years they will encourage the socialization of private enterprise; this has indeed begun. Yet, the small businesses are not responsible for that abuse; the large ones are which take advantage of their financial power to take over the market in a given sector, such as that of food products.

This also applies to supplies of lumber, building materials, anti-freeze, milk, bread, nearly all commodities, especially perishables, those products which cannot be renewed, which are wasted. Mr. Speaker, a mother of a family in Victoriaville, Sainte-Croix, Dosquet, Deschailons or Parisville or in any other constituency—

Mr. Francis: Or in Ottawa-Carleton.

Mr. Fortin: —or in Ottawa-Carleton, who goes to a store with the \$100 weekly pay of her husband in order to get some food finds that her husband's money which has been painfully earned brings nearly nothing on the table.

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The wage earner and his wife are victims of conditions beyond their control which they are in no position to alter, because this government, as the previous ones, has always encouraged agricultural and commercial measures setting a ceiling on production. For example, in the dairy industry, we have known and are still aware of a ceiling set on production more commonly known under the name of quota policy. The application of such a policy has been so ridiculous that our quotas have been set at low levels which farmers could easily reach by toiling and mooling. They could also often exceed them.

According to our genial Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Whelan) and his predecessor, not only the farmer's production was not paid nor encouraged, but he was penalized and compelled to pay a fine if he had worked or produced too much. Now our government in the Speech from the Throne suggests that we should fight the causes of inflation and lessen its effects by increasing production.

Mr. Speaker, we are going through a period of inflation, independently of international influences. This inflation was brought on in a great measure by ourselves, through lack of foresight and planning.

I see some of my colleagues shaking their heads. I would invite them to go and visit farms in the province of Quebec, in the eastern part of the country and in some parts of Ontario, they would see entire ranges that have been abandoned while some of them had been productive for two, three or four generations. Today, such a farm is not profitable because the farmer does not reap a fair return proportionate to the amount of work he puts into it.

Mr. Speaker, I recall a meeting held in Drummondville which was attended by the hon. member for Richelieu (Mr. Côté), the hon. member for Laval (Mr. Roy) a former minister, I have lost track of him—because with Mr. Trudeau, things change rather quickly—the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs (Mr. Ouellet). During this meeting, the farmers were asking for understanding, demanding a dairy policy that would enable them to survive. My colleagues remember that. What was the minis-