

Meat Inspection Act

powers that will be provided under this Act will include provisions for the inspection of establishments and registered establishments and the animals and meat products in registered establishments and—this is the point at issue—prescribing the fees payable therefor. Subclause (h) provides for the re-inspection of meat products and also prescribes the fees payable therefor. If it is not the Government's intention to use this Act as a means of providing for fees, is the Government prepared to exclude those particular words when we get into committee?

Mr. Mitges: Mr. Speaker, nothing has been decided regarding whether or not fees will be charged. There are ongoing discussions between the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Wise) and this sector as well as other sectors of the agricultural industry.

Fees could also apply to the fact that the establishments always paid for overtime. If the inspector had to be on overtime, it was the duty and responsibility of the plant to pay that overtime. Those subclauses could very well apply to any overtime that may be charged, as was the case on many, many occasions when I was with the Department in that capacity.

Mr. Althouse: Mr. Speaker, I would like it made clear that the Hon. Member is apparently now telling us that this does give the power by regulation to impose those fees and that he does now recognize that there is such a power in this Act.

Mr. Mitges: Mr. Speaker, I said no such thing. I said that fees could mean overtime as well. As I said earlier, nothing has been decided about whether or not there will be extra charges as far as inspections are concerned. These discussions are still ongoing and nothing has yet been determined.

● (1240)

Mr. Althouse: Mr. Speaker, it is somewhat confusing that an economic statement was presented to the House on November 8 and, when it pleases them, Government Members say that all of the items which were proposed in that statement are not the intention or the policy of the Government. If it was not the intention of the Government, why did it bring forward those items? If it was the intention of the Government to create discussion, why were those items not presented in the form of a study or discussion paper? The practice over the last 100 years has been, when an economic statement is presented, that it becomes the policy of the Government. I cannot understand why Members are deluding themselves into thinking that the economic statement and the position of the Government is somehow not now the policy of the Government. There has been no indication that the Minister of Finance (Mr. Wilson) is willing to forgo the money which he is intending to collect, or the money which the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Wise) will collect for him. The Minister of Agriculture has not indicated that he is willing to forgo that amount of money. Therefore, why do Government Members insist on telling us that these are matters which are still being considered when it is quite clearly the policy of the Government, and the Minister

of Finance who needs the extra \$65 million and who will cut \$33 million from the Department's estimates?

Mr. Mitges: Mr. Speaker, if the Hon. Member would take the trouble to look at former Acts covering the health of animals and the Meat Inspection Act, he would see that the legislation was very similar and that the overtime period which inspectors were required to work was described as fees. I would suggest that the Hon. Member take a look at those Acts, which have been in effect since the turn of the century. If I am not mistaken, the Hon. Member will discover that those Acts are the same as this legislation.

Mr. Althouse: Mr. Speaker, I have great difficulty understanding why the time of the House is being taken up with the regurgitation of Acts and powers which have existed since the turn of the century if this new legislation will not do anything differently. Why are we wasting our time if it is exactly the same?

Mr. Mitges: Mr. Speaker, I do not think we are wasting time. We are attempting to put everything under one cover. If the Hon. Member has any idea of the difficulty in working with several Acts, he would realize that a lot of time was wasted in that respect. Now that everything is under one cover, it is much easier.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Charest): I will now recognize the Hon. Member for Lambton-Middlesex (Mr. Fraleigh) on debate.

Mr. Sid Fraleigh (Lambton-Middlesex): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to take part in this debate and to set the record straight with respect to statements which were made by previous speakers.

Our meat inspection system is recognized world-wide as the best in the world. For people to cast aspersions on the system does not serve agriculture or the meat packing industry well.

The system has not only protected consumers, it has allowed them the luxury of having the full confidence that all foods that they buy that bear the "Canada Approved" stamp will be wholesome and free from bacteria or germs. There has been no thought of reducing the inspection or increasing the costs under the cost recovery program. It has simply been a matter of redistributing the costs in order that the people who benefit from the inspection will pay a share.

The Minister promised from the very outset that he was prepared to negotiate with all the commodities and that inspection fees would not be imposed until an agreement was reached with the commodities on a fee structure.

As I previously pointed out, our major plants have a world-wide reputation. I want to assure Hon. Members opposite that those plants will do nothing to harm that reputation. Our meat packers export a tremendous volume of products. The only way in which they can maintain the ability to export those products is through maintaining their high standards.