

Foot-and-mouth disease

At this point I should like to tell the house that the government will find it most difficult to be regulated in their actions by the usual practice of bringing every action which we may contemplate before this house before action is taken. I believe that can be quite well understood. For example, we are meeting today and will not meet again until Monday. Matters which are most important may come up in the meantime, and we may find it necessary to proceed without waiting to make an announcement on the floor of the house. All these matters have been considered as fully as possible under the circumstances, and we are prepared to take action when the necessity arises. We do not think it wise to be making announcements of action which it may not be necessary to take.

Farmers would be well advised to refrain from panic selling of their stock at this time, as the government does not intend to let this important part of the Canadian livestock industry bear the whole brunt of this unfortunate development. We are actively investigating alternative outlets for our livestock and animal products. Until the picture becomes clearer, farmers should limit deliveries of livestock, in so far as this is practicable. It should be apparent, and I consider this important, that stock delivered before ready for slaughter cannot be returned for further feeding. In other words, the farmers would be well advised to keep on their farms livestock which is not prepared for slaughter until further notice, as I believe it will be absolutely necessary to slaughter all animals which do come to plants in certain areas whether or not they are ready for slaughter. This can only result in lower returns to those who deliver animals in that condition.

Perhaps I should also add a word about internal measures to prevent the spread of the disease within Canada. It is the view of the government that quarantine arrangements can best be established by the federal authorities. We have legislation now which provides for that, and we have always acted under it. Every action which can be taken to take care of our responsibility in that regard has been taken, and we feel that it would be best if the matter of quarantine were dealt with by the federal authorities.

Mr. Diefenbaker: Mr. Speaker, may I be allowed to ask a question at this time? The minister stated that the farmers whose cattle were destroyed, that is those actively infected or those in association with cattle that were found to be suffering from the disease, would be compensated. I have received a number of telegrams from farmers in the infected area, and they want to know what the nature of the compensation will be. They particularly want

to know whether the government will give consideration to allowing special compensation in addition to commercial value in respect of purebred dairy cattle or purebred show cattle. Unless some compensation along that line is granted by the department, the loss in the area will be very large because the herds are, in the main, purebred.

When the minister is replying, there is one other point I believe he should clarify. The press in Saskatchewan has stated that it was in November that the existence of this disease was first suspected and the question submitted to veterinarians with a view to ascertaining whether it was in fact hoof-and-mouth disease. Will the minister state whether or not that is correct, and what took place between November and February, or give reasons for the delay in not acting sooner to preserve the country as a whole from the catastrophe that now faces it in so far as the livestock industry is concerned?

Mr. Coldwell: Before the minister rises may I ask a supplementary question which bears directly on this matter. I have also been approached with regard to compensation. In the newspapers we were told that the packing house or houses affected would be compensated. Is that so? If it is, will the workers in the packing houses that are affected receive some consideration, since the loss of employment is as grave to them as is the loss of business to the packing houses? I am asking these questions because they have been put to me.

Mr. Gardiner: In reply to the first question, Mr. Speaker, I would only say that it is the intention of the government to introduce legislation. We realize that the present legislation was not drafted with the intention of dealing with a situation of this kind. At the moment I am not in a position to say any more than that it is the intention of the government to introduce legislation. The fact that we are intending to introduce legislation should, I think, deal with the matter for the moment. That is one of the things I had in mind at the time that I said that we did not wish to be bound by the usual practice of giving notice here in the house before we take any action in the matter. We may have to make some pronouncements which have not yet been dealt with definitely by the house. Because of the remarks that have just now been made—and similar remarks would be made by others if there was the opportunity—we have reason to believe that it is the opinion of the house that certain things ought to be done. That in itself indicates that we are not satisfied with the provision that is now made and that something different will have to be done.