

Adjournment Debate

President of the Treasury Board, when we discussed this last night in the miscellaneous estimates committee, that we might enjoy each other's company until Christmas at least.

● (2220)

I ask for the support of Montreal members on this issue, and for the support of the hon. member for Saint John-Lancaster. I am sure he has been working behind the scenes. Sometimes conditions are so desperate that even government members must creep out from behind the curtains and involve themselves in debate on the floor of this House. After all, this is where the action should take place and where the hon. member's voters expect the action to occur.

I request the support of others when this bill comes before the House. I particularly request the support of those hon. members in whose constituencies there are flour mills. I ask them to talk on this important issue. I request the support of western members of parliament in whose constituencies grain is grown. I hope they too will discuss this issue.

I request the support of all who think of Canada as one country in which not only the more fortunate, central parts should receive economic benefits. The area I represent was good enough to serve, as it were, as the front line trench in two world wars. Our people were happy to see Halifax in that position. I think we should also be allowed the benefits of peacetime prosperity.

I wish the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Whelan) were here this evening. Sometimes in his homespun way he has a knack for shedding light, good sense, and reason on a subject. I must say that if I had to choose between running to the Minister of Transport (Mr. Lang) or to the Minister of Agriculture, to talk about some crippling injuries, I would be more apt to talk to the Minister of Agriculture and ask for his help. I hoped he would be here this evening.

I suggest that the government's proposal will lead to the ruination of our industry because the transport subsidy is to be swept away. It will either bring about the ruination of our industry, or the "rumination" of agriculture. I say this as the Minister of Agriculture, God bless him, said that studies were being carried on. Perhaps my question involves the most elaborate Latin based pun this House has heard for at least a couple of dozen years. It will be "ruination or rumination".

Are we depending on studies now under way in the Department of Agriculture? If so, what instruction has been given to those carrying out the studies? Will they lead to meaningful action for dealing with a pretty serious problem, one that, as I said a week ago, has ramifications involving \$100 million of Canadian economic activity?

Finally, let me ask this: as the Minister of Agriculture has spoken of studies by the Department of Agriculture, should not those studies have come first, and government policy afterwards? Could not the studies have pointed to some method of substituting something for a model program inaugurated by the government of the right hon. member for Prince Albert (Mr. Diefenbaker) in 1960, and carried on and modified successfully by programs put forward by another prime minister, the late Mr. Pearson?

[Mr. McCleave.]

I ask these questions and am sorry that the Minister of Agriculture is not here to answer. It seems to me that somehow the late show becomes a little debased when answers are put in the hands of people to be read and no meaningful action is taken. I say that sincerely and with regret to the hon. gentleman opposite who, I am sure, is going to answer.

[Translation]

Mr. Irénée Pelletier (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Agriculture): Mr. Speaker, I answered last evening the question just put by the hon. member for Halifax-East Hants (Mr. McCleave). I would like to add that I will convey to the minister the flattering remarks that were made.

I must also apologize for the minister. He is unable to be in the House this evening because, as we are aware, tomorrow he must announce the dairy policy for next year. He is now attending a meeting, and probably at midnight he will still be discussing the dairy policy to be announced tomorrow. Mr. Speaker, I agree with the hon. member. The fact that we already had to answer three questions on the late show concerning the problem raised by the hon. member tends to show how important the matter is.

Since I had to answer it yesterday and the answer has not substantially changed today, I give him yesterday's answer. Hopefully the hon. member will understand that as parliamentary secretary, I must transmit the answers given by the department. I know the minister considered the matter quite thoroughly and he may be in a better position to answer it tomorrow, with a somewhat better knowledge of the question, because he is now involved in the milk problem.

Mr. Speaker, I have no further answer than the one I gave yesterday. At the start, rates to that point or east of that point were intended, among other things, to maintain the competitive position of Canadian exports relative to those of the United States. The American rates have increased substantially since then, and it now seems it would be preferable to have in Canada a totally compensatory level of subsidy. However, since the subsidy has been in force for some time already, its cancellation will require some degree of adaptation for flour exporters.

As the Minister of Agriculture said, most countries try to mill their own wheat. To the extent that Canada tries to replace part of its flour exports by wheat exports, we therefore did not lose those markets. The world export markets of inferior quality flour subsidized by the European Economic Community is taking over an increasingly large part of the world market. In spite of considerable activity on the part of the PL480, even American sales have considerably diminished in recent years.

Canadian flour exports can be broken up in three categories: first, commercial exports, second, government exports, and third, Russian-Cuban exports. As we know, most of our sales are to Cuba. The removal of the subsidy will not affect these sales in 1976. On the long term, it is expected that Cuba will mill an increasing part of its wheat. In the meantime, the government will continue its efforts to keep this market.

Commercial sales and sales to the Canadian government made up the rest of our flour exports, or about 25 per cent.