

Food Policy

some evidence that they had got their heads together, too. In fact, they cannot even agree on the basic question of whether we even have a food policy. Today we had a statement by the Minister of Agriculture saying we have one, and another statement by the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs saying we need one. So much for cabinet solidarity!

Given the fact that these two gentlemen cannot agree on a question as basic as that, it is hardly surprising that the document seeks to come down on both sides of virtually every question involved here. The government is committed to the free market system, but it also favours supply management. It wants freer world trade in agricultural products, but it is determined to strengthen mechanisms to protect our domestic markets. So it goes on. Not only do we have a collection of generalities in this document, but even at the level of generalities the government is simply adding confusion and contradiction to questions which so urgently demand some clarity and direction.

● (1240)

We on this side of the House have never suggested that there is a simple cure-all for a national food policy. The issues here are both difficult and complex. The truth of the matter is that it is going to require a long-term, comprehensive approach in a climate of co-operation, not confrontation. There must be consultation if we are to bring some sense of order and stability to this whole area. Indeed, issues which are outside the direct purview of either of these two ministers and which, as I said before, are hardly touched on in this paper—transportation, land use, income support and subsidies—all have to be considered if we are to have a co-ordinated and sensible approach toward food production and consumption in this country.

To be perfectly honest, Mr. Speaker, I felt very sad when I read this paper. I really thought there was going to be a ringing declaration of how we had to expand the food industry. In 35 years we will be facing a doubled population in this world—seven billion persons in the space of a lifetime. During that time we must construct all of the infrastructure to feed those people. Here we are not talking about that. There is an old saying in my family: Lift the level of the lake and all canoes float higher. Somehow that quality is not in this document.

This document does not even talk about research and development. We have never utilized this approach. Incredible things have been happening in food technology which were utilized in the space program. Where does this document say that we are going to use the science and technology that is available? This is a rather incomplete and sad document. Some of the matters touched on in this paper, even in a general way, are necessary elements in any workable policy. No one will dispute the need for more and better consumer information about food, or the need for better public education on costs and nutrition. Now would anyone dispute the fact, given the shared jurisdictions in so many areas involved here, effective federal-provincial consultation and co-ordination is essen-

tial. We all can agree on those general goals. We will have to wait and see how the government plans to implement them in specific terms.

The Minister of Agriculture talks about “working seminars”, as he calls them, some time in the late fall or early winter—bless his heart—as if that were the next stage in the process. I say to him that there simply is not enough in this document to warrant waiting until late fall to get things moving. We have all seen just how heavy a price the country has had to pay for the government’s indecision and procrastination on major economic issues. I suggest to the Minister of Agriculture, along with his brothers and sisters in the cabinet, that rather than dilly-dallying for another six months he get down to business immediately. Why does the minister not refer this paper to a parliamentary committee and give it an immediate mandate to receive submissions from all groups with a direct interest in these questions? This paper is simply an agenda for discussion. Why do we not have serious debate? Who knows, Mr. Speaker, perhaps a parliamentary committee could make recommendations that even the two ministers could agree on. One is reminded that sometimes no matter how you slice certain kinds of pork, it is still baloney.

If these statements show one thing about the minister’s knowledge of the food system, it is that he certainly knows, how to package. One wonders whether this is the first document in the election campaign literature. However, as anyone in the food industry can tell you, Mr. Speaker, packaging is nothing without delivery. This government must deliver on a food policy.

Mr. Lorne Nystrom (Yorkton-Melville): Mr. Speaker, the most important thing about this document is its timing. It is brought before the House the day after massive publicity regarding the Ontario election. With all the papers full of the election coverage, the minister announces a new food strategy. I sympathize with the government. If I were a member of the government I would not dare release this information on a slow moving news day; it just would not be worth while.

We do not have anything new in this package, Mr. Speaker. It is simply a further study of some of our food problems, a cataloguing of some of the programs that are in place. The Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Whelan) argues that we already have a food policy. The Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs (Mr. Abbott) says that we do not have one. We still have disagreement between the two ministers in their statements to the House. As I say, there is nothing new in them. They are a typical piece of Liberal rhetoric for whenever the election campaign comes. They summarize existing policies.

About a year ago we had the DM Ten report which talked about a number of aspects of food policy. I think it is relevant to ask what the government has been doing for the last year, because the conclusion reached by this food strategy paper tabled today is that we need further assessment of food production in this country before we come up with a definitive program.