

For me, it is clear that we should increase our aid to agriculture, if we intend to check the exodus to the larger centres and counter all the social problems involved.

I am happy with the mention of feed grain in the Speech from the Throne. For four years, we in the province of Quebec notably campaigned to have the injustices suffered by the eastern farmers corrected. The fight is not over, but there is now hope, for the text of the Speech from the Throne is very clear to me, and I trust it is clear also to others.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to quote those lines once more:

The Government supports the principle of an equitable relationship of prices of feed grain to livestock feeders in various areas of Canada—

And this includes eastern Canada.

—It is the intention of the Government to implement before the next crop year, procedures that will ensure the optimum development of the feed grain and livestock industries within Canada.

However, Mr. Speaker, I want to caution the cabinet against a half measure now being developed by officials and which, should my information prove accurate, would be unacceptable to the Quebec farmers. I warn the House that after four years of struggle, I shall accept nothing less than an equitable solution. By taking this definite position, Mr. Speaker, I am speaking on behalf of all eastern farmers who are exasperated by administrative delays and shufflings of all kinds.

If we do not soon get justice, I shall regretfully support the thesis of the Quebec Minister of Agriculture which aims at self-sufficiency, even though I know that it will be very difficult to apply and that it even has a certain percentage of irrational use of resources and energy.

I am now giving a severe warning. Our lack of action in this matter of feed grain has perpetuated an obvious injustice that cannot be further tolerated. This is why we shall not put up with half measures, and I trust that I have been clearly understood.

Obviously, I should have liked to speak about the marketing of farm products, the dairy industry which is very important for agriculture in Quebec, but time is running very short and I would like to deal with several subjects equally of concern for my fellow citizens. I will certainly have the opportunity to come back to this great subject of agriculture.

Mr. Speaker, during the last election campaign the various welfare measures as well as their application and consequences were warmly discussed throughout Canada. Some contend that they are too generous and that they encourage laziness, social irresponsibility while others would want to get more assistance.

Very briefly I would say that people in my constituency are also worried about the sharp increase in social measures and, in particular, they have serious doubts about the relevance of the last amendments to the Unemployment Insurance Act. It seems evident that the recognition of illness as an eligibility criterion as well as the reduction of the number of weeks required to receive benefits has disturbed the labour market and made the application of the legislation difficult if not impossible.

The minister in charge seems to have been misinformed as to the future consequences of that legislation as well as

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the civil servants' ability to administer it. Delays up to five months and a great number of errors lead me to believe that we went too far and too fast in amending the former legislation. The harm is done and it will not be easy to go back, as those who are getting the benefit of the present situation will not see things in the same light. But with a few minor amendments to the legislation and especially a more efficient administration, somewhat decentralized—I emphasize that—things should improve. The administration of the Unemployment Insurance Act should be decentralized. It is too far from people who need it and has become inhuman. It has become the toy of technocrats.

I am sure we could easily correct the abuses and iron out the difficulties we have known during the first year the new act was in force. And those amendments should be adequate in order to improve the situation and make the law and its administration more consistent with the sound objectives the legislation aimed at.

The question of family allowances has also been of concern to my fellow citizens and that is why, Mr. Speaker, they are unanimously asking for the increase contemplated during the last session. However, we strongly oppose the measure whereby the amount allowed to each child would depend upon the family's income. That proposal is absolutely inapplicable. It would lead to abuses and costly and ineffective administrative complications and I totally agree with my fellow citizens on that matter.

• (1710)

They suggest rather that family allowances be included in the taxable income of taxpayers. Overpayments will be reimbursed according to the size of the family and its income. Without being perfect, this formula would seem equitable and very easy to apply. Furthermore, it is a means to achieve the intended goal which is to assist large families with low incomes.

The old age security program has also been the target of harsh criticism. Older citizens 65 years and over and without any income are still experiencing difficulties, especially in cases where one spouse has not yet reached the age of 65. Mr. Speaker, consideration should be given to the advisability of lowering the minimum age of eligibility to 60 for the spouse whose mate has reached age 65. Of course, there might be some requirements in order to avoid abuses. For instance, there could be a requirement that the recipients have been married for at least five years so that older people would not marry younger women, because there might be cases where 40-year-old women would be receiving old age security payments and this would not be acceptable.

I very often receive complaints about the annual guaranteed income supplement. In fact, each year, when people file requests to have adjustments made according to their income for the preceding year, we hear of grievances by people who did not obtain the desired adjustments or what they were hoping for. It is always the same thing and we must intervene. Even though people agree that those who have no other income should receive the guaranteed income supplement, this system discriminates against others who have saved and done without some luxury in order to contribute to a private pension fund.