

Foot-and-mouth disease

not shown that regard for the terrible consequences that will follow for the Canadian cattle market that should characterize a government.

The minister says that he has not before him the facts as to when these various occurrences took place. I obtained some of the pertinent dates this morning. A mere recital of them reveals a situation that demands the giving of more than the passing information which has so far been given by the Minister of Agriculture.

On November 26, 1951, the first outbreak occurred on the farm of Mr. Waas at McLean. The farmers in that area were talking about hoof-and-mouth disease throughout November and December. They were fearful. On the last day of November they got in touch with the dominion veterinarian at Regina. On the first day of December two federal veterinarians visited the farm, and on December 2 that farm was quarantined. The minister says that under the Animal Contagious Diseases Act quarantine is allowed for stomatitis. That is not my reading of the act. The farmers were asking why something was not being done. On a number of occasions the farmers in the area went to various veterinarians connected with government and submitted samples of saliva and parts of the animals affected by the disease. The answer that was given them, as I am informed, was, in effect: After all, we have enough samples such as that.

On December 2, the quarantine; on December 3, outbreaks on the farms of Mr. Wood and Mr. Smith at McLean, farmers who had helped on the Waas farm. I say to you, Mr. Chairman, there has been gross dilatoriness in respect to a matter affecting the export trade of this country. It should have been realized that the failure to meet the threat of hoof-and-mouth disease would immediately result in the closing of the United States market to Canada.

I understand that on December 25, or thereabouts, the disease was found in an abattoir in Regina. But between December 25 and January 29 nothing was done. The disease spread along the areas adjoining Wascana creek. The minister claims one cannot determine whether it is hoof-and-mouth disease unless you get the serum from England. How many hours and days would that take?

With a most dangerous challenge affecting the livestock market of this country, the government acted with that leisure that is a denial of the emergency that existed.

Mr. Gardiner: May I answer one question as to how many days it would take? The

quarantine order was put on on Wednesday. The serum of course can be flown over and is flown over. The actual check was made on Friday and Saturday.

Mr. Diefenbaker: That is exactly in confirmation of what I am saying. Why was it not determined all through the months of December and January while farmers complained of the situation and the spread of this epidemic? Surely, with the symptoms there, that could have been done. As a layman I can name the symptoms. There is the fact that as between stomatitis and hoof-and-mouth disease there is not too great a symptomatic difference. The symptoms being alike, one would think that immediately the serum would be brought over from England in order to ascertain whether or not it was hoof-and-mouth disease.

On and on delays continued until last Wednesday week; the government was waiting, hoping, but not acting. Finally, sir, on February 20 a general quarantine was applied to which the minister has made reference. On February 25, five days later, there was an announcement of the disease followed by an effect on Canadians in every province in the denial of the United States market to our cattle. That is an example of what we in the opposition have said, namely, the danger in recent years of having in the United States our main agricultural market which could be closed at any time.

That market was endangered by delays and failure to act. The Minister of Agriculture says in effect, we were not sure. My information is that in the United States, if there is any doubt, immediately an inoculation is made to determine whether or not the disease exists, and that is known in three to six days. That information is not segregated, specialized information that is known only to agricultural experts; it appears in the records of the United States Department of Agriculture. You did not have to wait even to send samples to England; those facilities were available. The explanations given by the minister of the continued delay and failure to act is one of the most serious condemnations that could be made against the present government. The great cattle industry of agriculture stood in the balance. That danger existed from November 26 until February 20, and all the officials did was to look at the general symptoms. It is true, as the minister says, that the symptoms were similar to the other disease; but instead of determining the matter finally they delayed and in the meantime the disease was spreading.