

Government Orders

A river runs very close to the barn, perhaps 700 or 800 meters away, 1,000 meters at the most. In May, the farmer applied for a permit to the Department of the Environment to build a liquid manure tank. Believe it or not, last week, he was still waiting for his permit to dig a manure pit. Why? "You are too close to the river". After being granted a permit to build a \$450,000 barn four years ago, why is he being told today that a permit cannot be delivered because he is too close to the river and why do they make him wait for a permit to dig a manure pit?

You see, too often, it seems as though, in some departments, the right hand does not know what the left hand is doing. Merely changing a name will not help to improve foolish situations like this one.

What has the Department of Agriculture done to improve rural services? I was about to say: "Nothing." But another department has chosen to close down some post offices, arguing: "They are not profitable".

An hon. member: Not any more.

Mr. Chrétien (Frontenac, B.Q.): Not any more, you say? But they did. Stop kidding me, they did. They closed down some post offices.

How about the road conditions. You could tell me: "The province of Quebec has jurisdiction over this issue". It is true, but what did you do four years ago? You cut transfers to the provinces. What did Mr. Ryan, the Minister of Municipal Affairs, do? He transferred \$500 million of expenses to the municipalities. Municipal governments do not have the money, the technology nor the know-how to maintain the smaller municipal roads.

• (1640)

Can you imagine the 1,500 municipalities of Quebec each buying a grader, a salt-spreader, a small bulldozer and a backhoe. It does not make any sense!

I know where the Minister of Finance is heading! Of course, it is not the Minister of Agriculture, but his good old buddy. The Minister of Finance will cut transfer payments to the provinces. He is paving the way for this announcement. He has promised not to increase taxes, but last night, on the news, he did say that they never promised such a thing. In the red book, there was a promise—but now they have discovered a gaping hole. They will not be able to fulfil their commitments; they will need more time.

I can see where he is heading! He is going to transfer part of the federal deficit to provincial and municipal governments, again at the expense of rural Canada.

I visited a small town whose 500 residents are concerned with gas supply. Standards for gas tanks are very strict and since it is too expensive and not cost-efficient to dig out old tanks and replace them by new ones, gas is not sold there any more. These people must drive 15 kilometres to buy gas. That is what it means to live in rural communities.

As for government services, since regional offices are not cost-efficient, they are closed down. People will just have to go to the city. As it happens, MAPAQ services were closed in Disraeli. Granted, Ottawa had nothing to do with this but these services were closed and people must now go to Thetford. If you need to have an autopsy carried out on a dead animal, you can no longer go to Sherbrooke. You have to go instead to Saint-Georges de Beauce.

These are small irritants people have to live with in rural areas. People are telling us it is not fun any more to live in the country, and that they want to move to the city to earn a living. Young farmers are fewer and fewer.

What has the Liberal government done this past year? After all, it will be a year next week since it took power. What has it done to help young farmers? Nothing.

One thing we must recognize is that this bill to change the name of the department includes amendments to update the real mission of Agriculture Canada. Therefore, this measure is part of a vast process of reorientation and redefinition which the government is going through with respect to this department's future.

It is in that context that during the next year, the Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food will try to redefine the future of agriculture in Canada. Let me tell you that this is a big challenge because considering the current economic and political conditions, one thing is sure, and that is that it is absolutely necessary to find a direction for the future of agriculture.

I submit that our discussions on Canadian agriculture must be based on the following three factors: First, the willingness to respect the provinces' priorities. I tell you, Mr. secretary of state, that if the priorities of the provinces are not respected, you are sure to fail. Second, the recent trade deals signed by Canada, in particular GATT and NAFTA. And third, the ability to balance the interests of the various regions fairly. It is not without reason that Quebec's farmers have great difficulty naming the federal Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food. There are hidden reasons and I know them.

• (1645)

There is nothing wrong with amending the act governing the Department of Agriculture with a view to planning the direction that Canadian agriculture will take in the future. However, before redefining anything, it is important to ensure that the provinces' work plans are fully respected.

In Quebec, this consultation and orientation process concerning the future of agriculture has already begun. Following Quebec's development model, the various players in the agricultural community have undertaken an extensive reflection effort. Let us just mention the *États généraux du monde rural* and the Trois-Rivières Summit which resulted in a series of real commitments. Quebec took the lead in laying down the principles on which that province's agricultural future will be built. It would be inconceivable that the federal government, the Liberal government, would establish national standards that are inconsistent with its own priorities and development goals. There-