

Oral Questions

office of the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development?

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, I am afraid I do not know the details of this matter, but I must say that when a man gives his life for an objective I must respect that and regard it as a very serious matter indeed. I will look into it with all the earnestness that it deserves.

However, I would remind the hon. member and the House that, as a government, we did offer as long ago as 1969 to abolish the department of Indian affairs if that was what the Indians wanted. We made a clear proposition to them and also stated that, in view of their grievances against the department, we were prepared to change the act progressively in that way. The President of the Treasury Board was then minister, and the Indians specifically asked us not to do so. So, in a sense, we are complying with the Indians' own request to keep the department in operation and to continue treating the native population in a special way under the Indian Act. We are doing that at their request.

In the meantime we are trying to meet as many of their grievances as possible. We named Mr. Barber as Indian claims commissioner for a long period, and we are now in the process of negotiating, with various Indian bands in different regions, solutions to their problems.

Mr. Firth: A supplementary question, Mr. Speaker. What the Prime Minister is saying sounds fairly good to me, but the Indian people across the country are still meeting with frustration in their dealings with this department. It seems that the department is working hard to perpetuate itself without really responding to the wishes of the Indian people across the country. Would the Prime Minister please see that that department makes moves to prevent further violence happening again and that it responds more to the wishes of the native people of this country?

Mr. Trudeau: Well, Mr. Speaker, in view of my previous answer I must take exception to the suggestion of the hon. member that the department is seeking to perpetuate itself. I repeat that the proposal of the then minister was to the effect that the department should do away with itself, leading to the situation where the Indian population would be Canadians like everyone else and would be treated under federal and provincial laws just like everyone else. I repeat that it was at the request of the Indians that we did not proceed in that direction.

In the meantime, in addition to the various suggestions I have made, we have set up a meeting between the National Indian Brotherhood and a group of cabinet ministers to deal on a continuing basis with the grievances that worry the hon. member and many of us on this side. We have this continuing structure with them at the ministerial level in order to help them make up their minds, as Indians, what the best course in the future is. As the hon. member knows, the Indian people themselves are very much divided on where their future lies and we understand they do not want to take any hard decisions in that regard. For this reason we have not abolished the department. We are meeting with them and we have said we will time our own actions to suit their priorities.

[Mr. Firth.]

[Translation]

AGRICULTURE

DAIRYING—REQUEST FOR REDUCTION OF LEVY ON EXCESS OF QUOTA

Mr. Léonel Beaudoin (Richmond): Mr. Speaker, I wish to put a question to the Minister of Agriculture.

In view of the fact that industrial milk producers in the province of Quebec now have to throw away 25 per cent of their production and that sooner or later many of them will go bankrupt and that, as a result, there will be a decrease in the amount of milk and powdered milk, can the minister tell the House whether he is considering reducing the levy of \$8.60 a hundredweight on the surplus of quotas before next September or October?

[English]

Hon. E. F. Whelan (Minister of Agriculture): Mr. Speaker, it is wasteful if they are throwing away a product. I have not been made aware of this. There is no necessity for them doing it because they are wasting energy producing the product in the first place that has no market. They would be better not to be doing that. Many producers have cut back a great deal on production and are supplying the market in an orderly fashion, which is what we want them to do. If they do that they still can make money. We know that and they know that. No, I am not considering changing the levy.

[Translation]

REQUEST FOR NEW POLICY TO HELP INDUSTRIAL MILK PRODUCERS

Mr. Léonel Beaudoin (Richmond): Mr. Speaker, I wish to ask a supplementary question.

If he did not know, I just told the minister that industrial milk producers now have to throw away 25 per cent of their production. Considering that heifers are hard to sell and that industrial milk producers cannot make money, I would ask the minister whether he would consider the possibility of establishing a new policy to help them on a temporary basis because of their lack of revenue due to the new dairy policy.

[English]

Hon. E. F. Whelan (Minister of Agriculture): Mr. Speaker, they have not been asked to cut production 25 per cent, they have been asked to cut it 15 per cent which would leave production practically the same as we requested last year. They know what markets there are and the provincial marketing boards know what markets are available for this production. This over-production does not make sense, unless we have an orderly, world distribution system. That is not totally my responsibility but is totally a world responsibility in which we would require all governments establishing monetary funds in order to carry out distribution to the needy people of the world. It is not the farmers' or the minister's responsibility to do that. Until we have that kind of a system it can be very wasteful, to repeat, to produce a product that has no known home.