

Supply—Health and Welfare

because it had been badly kept, the processor had the right and duty to refuse it; then, thousands of consumers would have been truly protected. The reputation of the farmers would not have suffered; and only a few lawyers would have in their pockets a few dollars less from the Department of National Health and Welfare.

The minister made a serious mistake when he mobilized the R.C.M.P. on Christmas eve to hand out summons to farmers throughout the province of Quebec, because around that time the same police officers might have focused their attention on Quebec City to prevent the distribution of thousands of pounds of meat from the United States which had been declared unfit for human consumption and, in addition, had been previously refused by the city of Montreal.

I ask the minister to look closely into this deplorable situation and to get in touch without delay with the farmers involved who are greatly concerned over what the future holds in store for them, because departmental employees who came to testify at the trial in Trois-Rivières behaved in a manner which would please Fidel Castro very much.

We should not forget that there are in your department some employees who, for these same reasons, they obtained their job, could be somewhere else. The officers of the department use the law to do their job. All laws are good, provided they are not abused. Every citizen can use certain laws. Take my case: this very morning, had I wished, I could have sent to jail the owner of a restaurant where I had breakfast. This afternoon, just with a written charge, I could have any hon. member in this house locked up. I will not do it, because we live in a democratic country and mutual co-operation should rank before felony.

In conclusion, I ask the minister to do whatever is possible not to cause prejudice to the Canadian farmers, and particularly Quebec farmers, since 75 per cent of them are no longer masters in their own house, because they owe their land to federal or provincial agricultural credit, their machinery to the banks, their cattle to the Caisses populaires, as a result of loans granted to them. Actually, they only have their wives left.

• (5:40 p.m.)

And, although the minister is unmarried, I am sure that he will not need the law when, one day, he asks a woman to take his arm.

Mr. Vincent: Mr. Chairman, we did not intend to speak at length on the estimates of the Department of National Health and Welfare, but since the discussion seems to drag on we thought it our duty to ask certain members of our party to speak in order to remove the obstruction which seems to rise on our extreme left.

We have several comments to make, but we had agreed to make them at another time. However, as we see that it is almost impossible to reach an agreement on that point, we thought we should speak immediately.

Mr. Chairman, I should like to put certain questions to the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. MacEachen), to whom I wish much success in his new duties.

I would like him to answer the questions I shall put to him when, a little later, he gives reply to the questions hon. members put to him. If he cannot do it now, he could answer them at a later date.

The first question is this: Mr. Chairman, it will be remembered that in 1963, his party, through the present prime minister, promised to extend student allowances to the age of 21.

It will be remembered that the former Minister of Justice, who now fills a high post in London, said to the house that the right hon. prime minister always kept his promises, and that he was giving himself four years within which to keep his promise to grant students allowances till the age of 21.

We would like the minister to tell us if he has had the opportunity, since he has become Minister of National Health and Welfare, to study the prime minister's promise, and to tell us when the government or himself expect to be able to grant these allowances to students until they are 21.

I ask that on behalf of the numerous Canadian families which see that family allowances have remained almost stationary since 1945.

If one compares the cost of living percentage points for 1945 with those of today, one sees that family allowances no longer meet the purposes for which they were granted in 1945.

I do not have figures here, this afternoon, but if my memory serves me correctly, the cost of living, according to the index set in 1949, was 100. In 1945, the cost of living would have been 75, according to the 1949 index. Today, we know that the cost of living increases very fast, particularly since the last two or three years. It even exceeds 140 points.