

*The Address—Mr. Mayer*

Throne Speech debate and how he had attempted to put up straw men and make false assumptions and statements about the kind of attitude which the Official Opposition has toward some of the problems with which we are faced today.

One of the points made repeatedly was that his was the only government capable of solving and addressing some of the major problems facing this country. The Prime Minister spoke specifically about social programs, about unemployment and measures his Government has implemented to help those less fortunate or for some reason those who find themselves in circumstances other than they would like. Probably the biggest failing the Prime Minister's Government has had, or any government has had in Canada, is that of being unable to do something about unemployment. I would also point out to the Prime Minister, and this is not original with me, that probably the greatest social program that anyone can avail themselves of is simply getting a job. If one adds up the people who are officially unemployed and adds to that figure those who are continually looking for jobs but have ceased to be registered officially as unemployed, I suspect close to two million people are out of work. That is a tragedy. Without a doubt that is the greatest social program that any government could address.

I have some misgivings about whether any government simply by its nature is capable of taking on the total employment program. That is probably one of the problems this Government has and is a topic for a whole speech; but to the extent a government can address employment and create opportunities for an individual to create wealth, add to the productivity of his family, his community and in total his country, this Government has failed and failed totally.

I would like to speak specifically about some of the measures in the Budget that address agriculture. I want to point out why I think they are really inadequate, but first let me preface that remark by complimenting the Government to a certain extent. There was considerable mention of agriculture in the Throne Speech. I counted up some ten areas. Briefly, I want to point out what they are and ask some questions and encourage the Government, where it is serious about some of the things mentioned in the Throne Speech, to come forward with appropriate legislation. If it comes forward with some of the things mentioned in the Throne Speech, we on this side would certainly support them willingly and encourage the Government to get on with them as quickly as possible.

● (1510)

Page 10 of the Speech from the Throne reads:

As part of the Government's thrust for growth, measures will be introduced to modernize and upgrade the fishery, forestry, mining and agriculture.

I am not sure I know what that means, but if I understand it correctly, I would encourage the Government to come forward with legislation flowing from this. Certainly we on this side would be prepared to support it willingly.

Another area in which I think the Government has fallen down miserably when it comes to accepting or assuming some of its responsibilities in agriculture appears at page 11 of the Speech from the Throne, where it reads:

To help ensure that food production will continue to be one of Canada's long-term strengths, a livestock stabilization program will be established in co-operation with the provinces.

Basically that is empty talk. The Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Whelan) has been on record for over two years as saying that he will address some of the problems facing the Canadian red meat industry. He is on record as saying that he has a plan in his back pocket and that he is prepared to come forward with it. He has said that repeatedly. We see it again in the Throne Speech.

People who are aware of the situation with the provinces will know that four provinces reached an agreement in principle in the fall of 1983 to proceed with a red meat stabilization program. It was initially endorsed by the federal Government, yet we have seen no support coming from it. We do not know whether the Government is prepared to put up any money. We do not know whether it is prepared to guarantee or underwrite any losses which the plan would have in the initial start-up stages. Of course, this would be a help to provinces and producers. In fact, my understanding of the way in which the discussions proceeded with the provinces leading up to an agreement by four producing provinces was that the federal Government really played a minimal role. This is the senior level of government in the country. Agriculture should be a major factor in the continuing growth of Canada. It has been in the past and has the potential to be so in the future.

We need some leadership and understanding of the issues and problems faced by agriculture on the part of the federal Government. We do not see that. What we see are statements in the Throne Speech which have been made before but unfortunately have not been followed up with any action. I find that very lamentable. If the Government were prepared to come forward with legislation to address what it says in the Speech from the Throne is a balkanization problem as far as livestock is concerned, we on this side would certainly be prepared to support it. I am not saying that we would support it without examining it or sending it to committee. If the legislation were there, we would certainly take a good look at it. If it were at all feasible and met with the approval of the provinces, we would certainly be prepared to look at it with the idea of supporting it.

There are two other areas which would help agriculture and not cost the Government a lot of money. In fact, one would not cost any money. A simple increase in cash advances would help. People in the agricultural community will understand what I mean by cash advances. It is a system whereby the federal Government guarantees loans that producers can take out against product they have already produced. It is a cash advance against future sale of a farm product which has already been produced and is stored on a farm. Such legislation has worked reasonably well in the past. In fact, I think it would be fair to say that it has been very good legislation. The losses have been minimal and it has put cash into the hands of farmers before they were able to sell their products. Many producers produce over a short period of time. They harvest in the fall of the year and are forced to store their products over a longer period of time. If they can obtain cash advances, it