

Meat Inspection Act

can have a judgment rendered against the person in the next court by way of civil proceedings. In the very unlikely event that the meat packing plant went out of business, there would be a mechanics' lien against it, I suppose. That virtually never happens because these corporations have an almost unending life. From the point of view of the very large corporate meat packing plants, the big three or four, the effect would be almost non-existent.

● (1220)

What worries me even more is when you go down the list to the next clauses. You find, and I quote:

—it is sufficient proof of the offence to establish that it was committed by an employee or agent of the accused—

The accused is the corporation.

—whether or not the employee or agent is identified or has been prosecuted for the offence, unless the accused establishes that the offence was committed without his knowledge or consent and that he exercised all due diligence to prevent its commission.

Management can always opt out of any responsibility by saying they did not know what the inspector was doing. Management hires the inspectors and provides them with the method of operation and tells them how to operate. However, if there is any subsequent problem from the spot checks that will continue to occur by federal officials, management can say they cannot help it, the guy or the gal doing the job was not doing the proper job and it is not their problem. The Bill goes on to point out in Clause 24:

Where a corporation commits an offence under this Act,—

In the unlikely event that the federal spot checker finds that the corporation has been negligent and the court finds it as well, and I continue to quote:

—any officer, director or agent of the corporation who directed, authorized, assented to, acquiesced in or participated in the commission of the offence is a party to and guilty of the offence and is liable on conviction to the punishment provided for the offence whether or not the corporation has been prosecuted or convicted.

The way that is worded and knowing how the meat packing industry operates, probably 99 times out of 100 that would result in the inspector being fined or sent to jail, if that is the punishment, rather than his manager or the leadership of the corporation. This puts the inspector in an invidious position. He or she is required to carry out on one hand the laws of Canada and on the other hand the requirements of his or her employer. The law as we are about to pass it provides that the employer is pretty well hands off. He sets the rules. He pays the employee and he fires the employee. Therefore, the employee is very much under the thumb of the employer, if the employer is not in any way responsible for the actions of that employee. As long as a directive is given verbally, it is very difficult to introduce that evidence into court. The employee has no way to go except to be fired and take the punishment that is meted out under this Act. The employer simply continues on his merry way, breaking the intention of the laws of Canada. He runs through a lot of employees, making them the scapegoats for the company's actions.

There are some loose ends in this proposal that will have to be checked in committee. I am truly sorry that the Minister was not here to explain why this Bill has to be brought in at this time. The explanation given by the Parliamentary Secretary only focused on humane slaughter, to which no one objects. It was in the old Act. It provided adequate safeguards whereby animals going into slaughter would be treated humanely and slaughtered humanely. That is not an adequate excuse for introducing a new Bill. The argument that this brings the search and seizure provisions in line with the Charter is not a legitimate excuse for bringing in the Bill. I suspect that this is very much one and the same as a necessary contribution to a carrying out of the cost recovery process that was initiated on November 8 last.

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture did not deal with that. I hope we will be given ample opportunity to discuss this with the Minister when the Bill goes to committee. It is extremely important because, under the proposed extra charges, in some cases the small processors will be forced out of business. That will be as a result of the fees they will be charged. They are not in a category where current regulations permit them to do their own inspection. They must have a federal inspector, both ante-mortem and post-mortem. A veterinary inspector has to make certain the animals were healthy and free from residue, antibiotics, before going into the slaughterhouse. They have to do a post-mortem inspection to make certain there are no anomalies that may make the meat unfit for use.

In those provinces which make use of federal inspectors, there will be a minimum charge of \$125 per plant. A lot of these plants only slaughter or process a few dozen head per day. This will run their costs close to an extra \$10 per head compared with their counterparts in the larger centres. It will much reduce their competitive ability. It continues a process that has to be slowed down of concentrating economic activity in very large centres to the disadvantage of the very small.

There are vast spaces in this country between the metropolitan centres. The economy of this country cannot survive if those centres are reduced to the point where they cannot supply basic goods and services. The populations of those areas will ultimately be forced out of the hinterland and into the metropolitan areas if this kind of policy continues. Frankly, I do not see how Canada can continue to make way for an economic recovery when vast regions of the country upon which that recovery is based are put at such a disadvantage that there can be no economic activity taking place there. It is discriminatory to small businesses, the producers as well as the consumers who would prefer to use local products, slaughtered and processed in the small communities.

The questions raised by this Bill, while not raised by the Minister, are questions that must and will be raised in committees. Canada's farm community, Canada's food processing and meat processing industry require the answers. It is not in the best interests of Canadians to come in with a program as the Minister of Finance (Mr. Wilson) did last November 8 which discriminates against small businesses and small communities