

Business of Supply

The Chairman: Order, please. My interpretation is that the estimates are temporarily withdrawn from the committee and do not in any way reflect on the rights of any member of the committee. When one of the estimates of the Department of Agriculture is brought in front of the House, it does not preclude or restrict any right of hon. members in the committee.

Mr. Wise: Mr. Chairman, as usual, it is not unusual to see government members opposite more interested in arguing procedural matters than in focusing their attention on the Department of Agriculture.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Wise: Mr. Chairman, the decision of my party to call back the estimates of the Department of Agriculture for further examination and debate was taken for a number of important and very legitimate reasons. It will demonstrate and reinforce our request for a greater opportunity to question departmental estimates than is now possible under our present parliamentary rules and procedures. It will demonstrate, if not to hon. members opposite, then to the nation, at large and to the agricultural community in particular, that we in this party are prepared to advance the importance of agriculture. We are anxious to remove agriculture from the wings and shadows where it now receives only the attention of lip service, perhaps the occasional bill, and just maybe a Friday afternoon in this chamber. Today's action will demonstrate the real concern, from this side of the House at least, that my colleagues and I possess for assurance that moneys appropriated by this department, and indeed others, are fully utilized for purposes producing maximum benefits.

I might suggest at this point that in this respect, generally speaking, this has not been a major problem in the Department of Agriculture. What we do question, however, is whether agriculture has been appropriated its just entitlement in relation to other expenditures of this government, and in this regard we are inclined to think seriously that it has not. One recent and prime example is the government's new dairy policy. Reductions and cutbacks resulted in every province, some to the extent of 20 per cent. Lower incomes and the creation of severe financial troubles for all dairy producers, and the probable collapse of some new and young producers, appear to be the ultimate result of this new policy.

In view of the recent frustration and dissatisfaction among Quebec producers, I think my friend from that province will agree that if funds had not been reduced, or could have been reduced on a more gradual basis, or if an effort could have been made to match supply with domestic requirements over a longer period of time, fewer hardships would have occurred. Personally speaking, I would not be at all surprised if a shortfall in product occurs toward the latter part of this calendar or dairy year—all of this while consumer prices continue to be high.

I want at this point in the debate to draw the attention of my colleagues to an article which appeared in the *Ottawa Journal* of Saturday, May 8, 1976. The headline reads: "Government Pins Survival Hope on Food Policy", and the first sentence reads as follows:

[Mr. Daudlin.]

The Trudeau government is busily trying to save itself from drowning in increasingly stormy political waters.

The article goes on to mention that heavy emphasis will be placed on reducing food prices. Mr. Chairman, whenever food prices are reduced for various reasons, experience has shown that primary producers have absorbed the greatest percentage of those reductions. It is indicated that the key department in the quiet development of a cohesive food policy is not the Department of Agriculture but, rather, the Department of Consumer and Corporate Affairs. The reasons, believe it or not, are said to be jurisdiction and, of all things, personality. If these reports are correct, and if this government needs a food policy, then I submit its proper place of origin and development is within the Department of Agriculture, with an input, naturally, from other concerned departments. The present and future livelihood of producers is totally dependent on a fair and equitable policy and their advice and counsel on any such venture is imperative. When I hear that policy papers are now in preparation for cabinet consideration, and in light of the government's past record of confrontation rather than open discussion and co-operation, I fear for the future of the agricultural industry.

It is unfortunate that because of the lack of action in certain areas, the cow-calf and dairy people for example, the lack of proper border protection for vegetable growers in the Fraser Valley, to name another and seemingly deliberate action to create division between producers and consumers, feelings are hardened and the confidence and understanding between these two groups is eroded.

The ongoing and highly publicized blow-by-blow battle between the Minister of Agriculture and the former chairperson of the Food Prices Review Board has instilled anger and, in many cases, distrust between producers and consumers. This feud personality conflict and running feud has served no useful purpose whatsoever. On the contrary, it has dismantled to a large extent the efforts of many service clubs in the country who, by a continuing series of special events, strive to bring rural and urban people together.

I continue to be completely amazed and utterly baffled by some people's reluctance to place problems in their proper perspective. When the dairy policy was announced, displeasure and objections flowed from both producers and consumers. Let me take a minute to compare briefly just how both groups are affected by this policy. The average producer could lose 15 per cent of his income to begin with. In addition, he will receive nearly 25 cents less for every 100 pounds of milk he produces. With a daily production of 1,000 pounds, a dairy loss of \$2.50 results, or a total loss of approximately \$900 for the year, not even taking into account the percentage of reduction in milk subsidy quota.

At the same time, butter has increased by approximately 5 cents a pound. With the annual per capita consumption running at 12 pounds, this means an increase of 60 cents for the entire 12-month period to purchase the same amount of the product. What we are left with is \$900 less for the producer, compared to 60 cents more for the consumer—and bear in mind that dairy producers themselves purchase higher volumes of butter than do average consumers.