

*Slaughter of Calves*

measures. We have urged producers to increase their production in the face of a demand which seemed to be on the increase. It was not and we have surpluses today.

As a government we have, therefore, responsibilities towards producers, and we must live up to their expectations and help them. It became more difficult because production costs has increased excessively over the last two years. The cost of feeds and grain has almost doubled which has also been prejudicial to producers. Not only are they not getting a fair price for their product, once it has reached the market, but also it is costing them more to deliver it to the market.

There are many explanations to this, and as I have but a few minutes at my disposal, I shall not dwell on them.

I want to remind you that today, governments must take position on this problem and that the incident which has taken place yesterday in Saint-Bruno, in the Lac Saint-Jean area, has served as a spark to trigger this debate. As a representative of that area, I would like to say that the farmers in my riding are not more unruly than others. It is rather the contrary. They are disciplined producers who are aware of the fact that in order to sensitize governments, and especially consumers, a shock treatment is needed. Consumers have been used to pay a rather low price for food in Canada. They have been spoiled for years and it is difficult for them to accept paying reasonable price.

It is unfortunate that the farming community should have to resort to means such as those we witnessed yesterday on the national television network from Halifax to Vancouver. It is unfortunate that the farmers should have to resort to such means to make the consumers aware of the difficulties the farming community is now experiencing, and especially, which is more important, of the problems the consumers will have to face themselves in a few years if we, the people, do not accept to support the farmers who, in 1974, represent only 7 per cent of the Canadian population.

It is impossible for 7 per cent of the Canadian people to continue producing food at a low price and accepting to live on the fringe of society. It is indecent to ask 7 per cent of the people to work, produce and give the others comfort and more. We must take on our responsibilities towards that group of workers, the farmers.

This evening, we are dealing with the question of beef producers; tomorrow, we will deal with that of turkey breeders, and the day after, that of dairy farmers. The whole gamut of food products will have to be dealt with.

We have a choice, Mr. Speaker, we can abandon agriculture to its fate, and let it adjust to the natural forces of the market which tend strongly towards doing away with a third of the farmers, at the risk of perhaps having to pay very dearly for our food within the next few years. That danger exists even now, let us not forget it. Food could even be rationed, we could be deprived of it no matter how much money we would be willing to pay for it.

The danger is real and governments cannot shirk their responsibility of ensuring decent food to the people. If we are to do our duty, as members of Parliament, we must support the government, the cabinet and especially the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Whelan) who is fighting with

all the the means available to him in order to obtain the support of his colleagues of the cabinet, but who must also get the support of each and every member of Parliament and of Canadian consumers to guarantee the farmers a decent income for the work they do for us, seven days a week, for very costly investments and also for the great risks they take in order to provide us with food. If we are not prepared to give this support to agriculture, we will have to accept the odiousness of the situation we will be in as consumers in a few years.

I say that if we rely on the studies, on the report of the Plumtre Commission or on the report which has just been tabled, Professor Forbes' report, we should let agriculture adjust itself to the forces of the market. If we do that, Mr. Speaker, in a few years the same people who recommend today sanctioning agriculture will probably say: the government did not act timely, the government did not look after the agricultural community and today, we face scarcity, rationing and starvation.

I sometimes wonder, Mr. Speaker, whether it would not be good for us to be rationed by the agricultural community for some time. It is perhaps a lesson we have to be taught and experience. We have been overfed for too long, we do not really know the price of the comfort we enjoy in Canada. I say farmers are getting ready to teach us a lesson. They warn us and if we are not intelligent enough to understand the message they want to convey, I think we deserve punishment, which perhaps will not be very long coming.

In July of last year, only 50 per cent of the expected shipments came in Montreal and dealers got only 25 per cent if not less, of their orders. There was restlessness in the newspapers or on television, everywhere. We heard a cry of restlessness. We thought we would have beef rationing, a phenomenon that had been almost nonexistent since World War Two. We did not learn from last year's lesson. We did not learn and if we are not prepared to take steps to help our farmers, we deserve another lesson and we shall get it.

Before resuming my seat, I should like to refer more specifically to the situation in Quebec. There are approximately one million heads of dairy cattle in Quebec. The dairy herd is our main source of beef. Most of the beef we eat comes from that part of the dairy cattle not required for milk production. The cows are covered or artificially inseminated to produce beef animals.

Unfortunately the Quebec producer engaged in milk production cannot have the benefit of government assistance, of the excellent program announced by Minister Toupin of Quebec. I commend him for his remarkable program, undeniably the best of all those offered to beef producers in Canada. But of course it is meant exclusively for beef producers and those who devote themselves to milk production, who are bound to milk quotas cannot get this assistance and, perforce, must get rid of young calves as we saw yesterday, because there are no buyers.

We cannot expect those producers to feed those calves all winter long to give them to us free next spring! That is impossible! What we saw last night seemed to shock the weak-hearted. We saw happen in the open what occurs in the near building that is the slaughterhouse of the Saguenay co-ops. We saw the slaughter of animals. That is what