

Oral Questions
AGRICULTURE

BEEF IMPORT QUOTAS

Mr. Maurice Foster (Algoma): Mr. Speaker, my question was for the Minister of Agriculture, but in his absence I will direct it to the Acting Minister. Last December the Government invoked the meat import law in response to the EEC dumping subsidized beef into Canada. Since then the Government has been retreating on these quotas which it has imposed. The Government has increased the United States quota from 21 million pounds to 65 million pounds. The Government is in the process of negotiating an increase of the EEC quota from 5.9 million pounds to 33 million pounds. Why is the Government backing down under pressure from the EEC and the United States, and not protecting the interests of the Canadian livestock industry?

Mr. Gauthier: Where's the beef?

Hon. Charles Mayer (Minister of State (Canadian Wheat Board)): I thank the Hon. Member for his question, Mr. Speaker. To bring the Hon. Member for Algoma up to date on what is happening, Canada invoked, for the first time, provisions under the Meat Import Act, which the previous Government should have done in the previous fall.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Mayer: We have told our trading partners that we are prepared to negotiate with them to try to arrive at an agreement satisfactory to everybody. If we cannot arrive at a negotiated settlement, we are prepared to invoke the Act. In the meantime the European Economic Community has threatened retaliation. The Minister for International Trade is working with the EEC to work out a satisfactory arrangement that at the same time protects the meat industry while being fair to the other commodities against which the EEC has threatened to retaliate.

We have not increased the quota to anybody as yet. If the Hon. Member has information that I do not have, I would very much like to know where he got it.

Mr. Foster: Mr. Speaker, it is common knowledge in the trade. The Ministers should be reading their briefing notes better.

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Foster: I just want to point out that this is one of the most cowardly retreats the Government has ever undertaken. The Government is totally abandoning the beef producers.

Mr. Clark (Yellowhead): Why did you not invoke the law?

GOVERNMENT POSITION

Mr. Maurice Foster (Algoma): Mr. Speaker, why is the Minister not prepared to march into the GATT tribunal, and stand up and fight for the farmers and the beef producers of

this country, instead of taking the cowardly action that has been taken?

Some Hon. Members: Order.

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Hon. Charles Mayer (Minister of State (Canadian Wheat Board)): Mr. Speaker, if we wanted to talk about cowards we would certainly have to talk about the behaviour of the Government from 1974 to 1975 to 1976 when it did absolutely nothing for the beef producers country when that Government could very well have done so.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Broadbent: Right on.

Mr. Mayer: Let me also tell the Hon. Member that it was not an act of cowardice when this Government invoked the Meat Import Act which this Party and the New Democratic Party supported when it was passed by the previous Government. We are not being cowards. We are living up to our responsibilities on behalf of the total agricultural industry to see that we have a chance to trade, and to trade fairly, internationally.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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NORTH AMERICAN AIR DEFENCE

NORTH WARNING SYSTEM

Mr. Derek Blackburn (Brant): Mr. Speaker, my question was for the Prime Minister, but in his absence I will put it to the Secretary of State for External Affairs. Why did the Government commit itself to the development of space based system technologies in the North Warning System agreement when the development of space based systems is forbidden by the ABM Treaty?

Right Hon. Joe Clark (Secretary of State for External Affairs): Would the Hon. member quote specifically from the portion of the agreement to which he is referring, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Blackburn (Brant): I would have thought the Secretary of State would have had that at his fingertips.

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Blackburn (Brant): It is forbidden by the treaty.

Mr. Deans: It is bad enough when you have to tell the Minister what is in his agreements.

Mr. Blackburn (Brant): I was under the impression that the Secretary of State for External Affairs was aware of what was in the treaty.