

Borrowing Authority

to deal, and they worked in a small office. I must compliment them on the job they are doing, but they were trying to work with a plan that had not been given enough thought.

I see that the Minister of Agriculture is in the House tonight. We have not seen much of him recently, but I know he has been busy travelling. I have followed his journeys around the country, and I have read most of his speeches. An hon. member who spoke earlier told us that his son was forced to watch when the minister was making a speech, and he jokingly mentioned that it was punishment. I do not know if I want to make that sort of comment about the minister's speeches, but I did read most of them.

I am very concerned about what is happening to the proposed meat import law. I can trace the history of the catastrophe which has fallen upon the Canadian beef industry since 1976, when Australia and New Zealand sent massive amounts of beef to this country. For a long time cattlemen all across the country have been asking for a beef import law. The bill was finally introduced before Christmas, but it was a meat import law rather than a beef import law. It will apparently apply to things other than beef. We applaud the introduction of that bill, but we have not seen anything of it recently.

The minister will be well aware of what has happened to cattle prices since the new year. There has been a ten-cent per pound decrease in the price of live cattle. This is the time of year when producers make decisions about how many heifers to breed, about the size of cow herds for the coming summer and the size of the resultant calf crop a year from now. This will determine the amount of beef available to the Canadian consumer two years from now. This is a critical time of year for many people in the beef industry. They must decide how many cattle to keep and how many heifers or cows to breed for the coming year. The minister has not shown any interest in this meat import law.

It is disgraceful that the Standing Committee on Agriculture has not met this year. This afternoon I presented a motion under Standing Order 43 protesting this. The agriculture committee is very able; it is one of the least partisan committees of this House. It has a genuine interest in agriculture in this country, but it has nothing to do at the moment.

If the bill were referred to the committee, it would receive immediate attention and fairly swift passage, but for some reason the minister cannot seem to prevail upon his House leader to bring it before the committee.

The drop in live cattle prices has come about largely because of imports from the United States. That is another story, and I hope to get into it later. It is mainly because of the influx of U.S. fat cattle that beef prices have dropped. Feed prices have risen, which I think this is a healthy sign as far as general agriculture is concerned. Interest costs are high, and this is one of the major factors in the cost of finished animals. These costs are even greater than the yardage cost of keeping an animal. It would give some stability and assurance to the beef industry in western Canada if the government cared about it, and if the meat import law were brought before this House and passed. I admit that it would not solve all the problems of the industry,

but it would be a major factor in bringing stability to the beef industry. I therefore urge the government to give serious consideration to referring that bill to committee as soon as possible.

As I said earlier, the committee has not met since before Christmas. I think that is deplorable. It is a very good committee, but it has nothing to do, and important legislation just waits.

Things like that disturb us when we are asked to comment on the government's spending plans. This borrowing bill does not take into account nor answer some of the legitimate questions of Members of Parliament about what the government intends to do with the money.

The hon. member for Crowfoot (Mr. Malone) spoke eloquently this afternoon about the debt awaiting newborn children when they enter the world as Canadian citizens. I did not write down the figures he used, but I think he said something to the effect that five years ago each newborn Canadian would assume a debt of \$800 and that today it would be something like \$2,200. That is a deplorable situation.

When we campaign for election to this House, we speak to people all across the country. I think the most exciting people I talk to are young people. I am sure we have all had meetings with high school students, and I know I find these more intimidating than the all-candidates meeting arranged by different groups in constituencies. Young people ask very solid, penetrating, simple and straightforward questions. They want to know their future, their chances of earning a living, of staying in the province or the region of their choice and of pursuing their lines of interest. We cannot help but admire them for the questions they put to us, but then we think about the debt the government is passing on to them. Their questions are legitimate, and they are questions Members of Parliament must ask the government. These things concern me when I study this borrowing authority bill.

Let me conclude by emphasizing a couple of points. We all realize that the government must borrow more money. That is a way of life for all of us whether we operate businesses or farms or practise professions.

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Whatever we do to earn a living, we should realize that when we borrow money, we have to be accountable for that money being repaid. In turn, the people from whom we borrow must be satisfied that we are responsible and able to repay it. In my opinion, this bill does not meet that kind of criteria. I think all of us would feel much better if we could be confident that the government, which is asking to borrow massive amounts of money in currencies around the world, would use that borrowing to invest in this country for a more productive future. By doing that we would have less debt to pass on. We would be able to leave the young people of this country with a place and a chance to make a living, just as we started out, without some of this massive government debt we all now bear.