

*The Address—Mr. Towers*

In the 1973 budget the federal government started to meddle with the beef industry by removing the import surcharge. Last August, without any warning and while parliament was not in session, this government created a chaotic situation for all beef producing provinces by imposing a surcharge on beef exported to the United States. This is another example of an inept government causing hardship through inconsiderate interference.

On that particular day I was having lunch with the manager of a western Canada packing plant. We knew that the cabinet was meeting to make a decision. When the manager asked me if I thought the federal government would impose controls, I said that I hoped not because there had already been too many government controls put into effect. My feeling was that such action would not achieve anything but would disrupt the industry, and that surely the Minister of Agriculture would be wise enough and would have sufficient influence on cabinet to prevent this move. I naturally thought that, should the government decide to place a tax on beef going to the United States, this would not come into effect in the middle of a week. However, as everyone knows, that is exactly what the government decided to do. It announced controls on beef exports late on Monday evening. That asinine move at an inopportune time cost producers of beef thousands and thousands of dollars. One man lost \$5,000 on just one shipment. Had he not been deprived of that \$5,000, it would have counteracted to a degree the losses he is experiencing today.

The Minister of Agriculture must know very well that there are many feed lots in western and eastern Canada which are only partially in use. Let me impress upon this government that there will be fewer animals in feed lots this coming year than there have been for a long time. People do not forget, nor can they overlook the careless handling of their very livelihood by a mismanaged government which panics and reaches decisions without regard for the implications and hardships which follow.

I would urge the government, for the benefit of all Canadians, to recognize the seriousness of the situation faced by the red meat industry. The inequity the government has created in the hog industry as between east and west has resulted in hog producers cutting down production. In the hog industry, apparently the proper ratio is the slaughter of one full grown sow to 20 market hogs. In the past several months the ratio has been one sow slaughtered to 13 market hogs—quite a cutback—which means that we will be short of pork in this country. The cattle industry is in the same position. People are fed up with the meddling and unnecessary interference, plus the lack of consideration and sound policy on the part of the federal government which would encourage production, at a time when the world is hungry and there is a 5 per cent shortfall in the production of grain.

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Canada imported over 70 million pounds of beef last year. In 1974 the amount will no doubt be greater. In 1972 this country imported under 30 million pounds of butter. For 1973 the estimated figure is in the neighbourhood of 50 million pounds. Milk production dropped by 5 per cent last year also. Where does this government think it is leading the Canadian people, or where is it pushing them, when

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we cannot even supply our own requirements, with all the potential and the ability that we possess to produce?

Problems within agriculture are mounting. Farm labour is in short supply and producers are becoming discouraged because the government does not care enough to provide an atmosphere in which the industry can survive. All we can do right now is to await with anticipation the legislation that the Minister of Agriculture is supposed to be bringing forth. But we in the official opposition wish to warn him now to take note that we will continue to scrutinize his proposals to see whether this time there is anything that can benefit the producer and consumer. When production decreases, the producer suffers and every consumer suffers. Vast numbers of Canadian consumers are now suffering and can only look to additional hardship as a result of the inefficiency of this leaderless, "don't care" government.

Why is this government not doing something now to alleviate the bottleneck in the grain industry? What does it need to see the light? Twelve ships are waiting at the west coast to load grain. The grain is not there. There will be ten more ships docking next week. Demurrage charges are mounting. Elevators are plugged. Farmers are anxious to move their grain before spring break-up and seeding commences. This government sits on its hands in Ottawa while the Wheat Board asks farms to deliver their grain. Anyone in the know realizes why there is frustration within the agricultural industry.

When the Minister of Manpower and Immigration (Mr. Andras) announced the current local initiatives program, he asked members of parliament to co-operate so that the program could fill the need in the most deserving areas. He requested advice on projects which would be most suitable. I know that some members would not have anything to do with this controversial program due to previous examples of poor judgment and abuse which they could not stop no matter how hard they tried. But I believed it to be my responsibility to try to offer some advice, to help my constituency and to help the minister. His request was complied with: a constituency advisory group was set up and there were several projects to submit. In November of 1973 I informed the minister, through his staff, of three projects that I considered to be worth while to the communities concerned, and I informed him by letter directed to his office. These were projects from which there would be continuing benefit; in other words, the money would not have gone down the drain.

In order to try to get these three projects approved—and they do not go beyond the total allotted to my riding—I made numerous telephone calls and finally contacted a member of his staff. But I ran up against a stone wall and the three projects have not yet been accepted. On countless occasions calls were placed to the minister directly and the promise given that he would return my call. I am still waiting for that call. Four months have passed and I have not received an answer for my constituents. They are waiting and so am I. No other business could function or remain solvent under such sloppy management; and I do not conduct my constituency business in that manner either.