

Slaughter of Calves

The Farmers' Union now speaks a different language. There is no more talk about reports, study committees or recommendations to the minister, but of strategy and of fight to a finish with the government. To use the words of the secretary general, Mr. Jean-Marc Kirouac, it is necessary "to settle matters with the province before dealing with the federal government".

Farmers and especially beef producers want a standard of living comparable to that of city dwellers, which is far from being the case for the 38,000 Quebec farmers, except for a few.

The Farmers' Union sent to Premier Robert Bourassa a telegram requesting essentially:

- that the price of their products reflect production costs;
- that the cost of production be escalated;
- that the farm producer get an income comparable to that of the skilled worker in industry;
- that a \$150 adjustment be given in two payments of \$75 in the fall and in the spring to facilitate the purchase of feed grain during the winter;

● (2120)

This shows that there is no calf surplus but a lack of feed, and that is what the farmers are asking for in our area. On October 31, they said concerning the grants requested:

The grant proposed by Mr. Normand Toupin represents approximately 13 cents a pound and applies only to 2000 out of the 10000 producers who need it.

That is the problem at the provincial level, and that is why, if the federal government does not intervene and provide assistance, hundreds and thousands of calves will continue to be slaughtered. I now resume the quotation:

This \$2.6 million grant applies only to the producers of slaughter calves, said Mr. Dagenais. It does not concern feeders who feed calves to produce beef . . .

According to the Union, this represents \$40 million, of which the Agriculture Department gave \$5.8 million—

This serves to give an idea of the amount Quebec is expecting from the federal government. Again I quote:

What is \$34.2 million, he said, to save the Quebec agriculture, compared with the hundreds of millions of dollars given by the Quebec government as subsidies and tax exemptions to ITT, a multinational concern?

And what about the \$90 million which the federal government granted to the American aircraft companies, supposedly for creating from 2,000 to 3,000 new jobs, when we know the number of jobs created in agriculture? Mr. Speaker, I feel comparisons are impossible in this case.

This type of slaughter was criticized by many people. Perhaps our farmers would have been better inspired to slaughter their steers in front of the supermarkets and give away the meat to needy families who cannot afford it.

Public reaction might have been better, for the general public cannot tolerate to be made aware of these destructions. As far as farmers are concerned, in view of the present situation, they had better destroy these animals instead of getting into debt for three times their value during the summer months.

Mr. Speaker, I wish I had the time to quote figures to give an estimate of the losses in the whole Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean area, but since the time allotted to us is very short and I do not want to go beyond, I will say very simply that the hon. minister ought to do something immediately and not wait one, two or three months or till

[Mr. Gauthier (Roberval).]

the winter is over to take action in order to put an end to those slaughters of calves. We, the whole population of the Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean area, are looking forward to his action, and I know it can be effective.

Mr. Marcel Lessard (Lac-Saint-Jean): Mr. Speaker, I think this is an excellent opportunity, tonight, to review during this debate the situation prevailing in the beef industry in Canada. This debate is obviously the result of a series of events which happened those last few days in Quebec and reached its climax with the slaughter of a certain number of animals yesterday in the Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean area and particularly in the municipality of Saint-Bruno, within the constituency I am representing.

It stands to reason that I had to take part in this debate for several reasons. First of all as a member for an agricultural constituency; second, as an active member of the House Standing Committee on Agriculture, and as a consumer and a producer concerned with the producers' welfare, of course, and also in order to ensure food at decent prices to consumers.

Mr. Speaker, what caused the situation we are in today? Why have producers come to the point of organizing such demonstrations? We have to consider the governments' programs and the general situation in the meat trade and industry.

As regards beef, if we look back two, three, or four years ago, we will remember that some economists, some market analysts who make projections, were unanimous in predicting a beef shortage in the world markets. They predicted that shortage and they asked the government to take the necessary steps to provide against it.

Realizing they would be held responsible for that situation in one way or the other, governments responded to the suggestion and created programs to encourage the development of domestic beef production. Canada, the United States, Europe, the Common Market, Argentina, New Zealand, Australia, in fact all the important producers of beef most of which are at the same time exporters, developed programs designed to increase beef production. They had to, because it is not a production that can be increased quickly. Such was the situation about four of five years ago. This government participated in the program by providing assistance to increase grazing land, herd efficiency and to encourage artificial insemination, which developed very rapidly and permitted to increase the capacity of our beef stock, all of which resulted in the fact that our agriculture and our producers increased their efficiency more rapidly than the shortage predicted by analysts came along.

● (2130)

Finally, production was increased faster than the predicted shortage came along. We find ourselves today with surpluses, temporary ones, needless to say, which are going to vanish to a large extent within six months at the utmost and it is possible that prices will get back to a more normal level. If we fail to intervene promptly and judiciously it is also possible that the prices will increase more than normally due to a scarcity which can reappear.

Such a cycle is not easy to control, Mr. Speaker. The beef industry is confused because of certain government