

Feed Grain

needs to know, that is part of his concerns. He is concerned about not being able to get what he needs for his stock. That is very important. One can also talk about an animal being changed or upset by an altogether different diet, and all that because of the feed grain shortage.

All hon. members who follow the situation closely, and several sit on the agriculture committee, know what I mean and the kind of concern or difficulty that means to producers.

In spite of all these reasons and arguments that have been discussed for two weeks, we are still waiting for a solution, a proposal that we are ready to support and, hopefully, a worthwhile one. We ask only one thing; an adequate solution acceptable to both parties, of course. It is not a matter, Madam Speaker, of condemning the union or condemning the strikers. Their contract expired on December 1, 1974. Why should negotiations drag on and on? How can one explain demands which to some extent seem founded? No one seems to be able to find a solution. What are we waiting for? That the farmers be even more helpless, that the people demand a special government legislation?

● (2050)

I know full well, Madam Speaker, that the matter was brought up in government caucus this morning. The Prime Minister said, yesterday I believe, that he was looking into the possibility of passing special legislation. Bearing in mind the public interest, that of the farmers, when are we going to decide that the time has come to straighten out this mess? That is what we are waiting for.

Will we see a repeat performance of the public slaughter of cattle we witnessed not so long ago in Quebec? Within a couple a days, Madam Speaker, because of the inertia of the government, we will face once again that spectacle both disastrous and revolting, but justified by the inaction of the government which refuses to assume its responsibilities. That's that, Madam Speaker.

I spoke this morning to the representatives of the the Agricultural Producers Union and the Feed Mill Owners Association. It is clear that the producers cannot tolerate much longer that inertia and lack of concern on the part of the government towards Quebec farmers. The APU and the Feed Mill Owners Association sent an SOS to the government: Something must be done. We, of the opposition, especially those from Quebec, who are living through those difficulties, and those from other provinces who understand them—and we will have proof of it after my speech, Madam Speaker—are also appealing to the government.

Personally, I feel obliged to condemn the present attitude of the government because it has failed to intervene. What is it waiting for? I trust the minister responsible or other hon. members will give us an answer in a little while. Is the Quebec representation not sufficient to prove to the rest of the party that the situation is critical? Sixty Quebecers have failed to convince the minister in charge to do something. That is embarrassing, Madam Speaker. It is indeed embarrassing that 60 members have not been able to convince the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Whelan) and the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) to do something in order to meet the pressing needs of the producers.

[Mr. La Salle.]

Therefore, I accuse the government, Madam Speaker, of having been thoughtless and weak in the face of their responsibilities. I accuse the government of cutting the Quebec producers adrift, even if this province has given much support to the government, it seems to me. I also accuse the Quebec members of unforgivable negligence towards the Quebec farmers, and at the same time, I urge the Quebec producers to remember in due time this obvious act of cowardice at such a difficult time.

Madame Speaker, it is hard to accept these criticisms. If the government intends to introduce a special legislation, I hope it will find another solution. They have some responsibilities with respect to negotiations which should be progressing and are not, contrary to what one of the ministers has said; the Acting Prime Minister did say on April 10 that negotiations were going along well, despite the fact that they had been interrupted since April 2. This information was false and the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Whelan) kept on saying for two weeks that the situation was not as bad as suggested. Today there are opposition members, apart from the Quebec members, who are aware of the situation. There are also members on the government benches who are aware of the situation and I urge these gentlemen to be honest and to assume their responsibilities towards the farmers of Quebec. If ever they have wanted to provide answers and make a positive gesture which could breed results, the opportunity is theirs this evening.

Madam Speaker, I know that many speakers will rise after me. Before concluding, I urge the government to provide answers for producers, not merely for us, but for them through us. It is our duty to beg for such answers this evening and I venture to hope that the government will become more sensitive and less unconcerned that in the past two weeks.

Hon. André Ouellet (Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs): Madam Speaker, I hope the Opposition members will allow me to deal with the statements made by the hon. member for Bellechasse (Mr. Lambert) and the hon. member for Joliette (Mr. La Salle), who jointly moved this motion.

I should like first of all to tell hon. members that the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Whelan) would have liked to be in the House from the very beginning to take part in this debate. As hon. members doubtless know, this special emergency debate was agreed upon at the very last minute. A Cabinet member as active as the Minister of Agriculture never refuses an opportunity to make a speech on a Wednesday evening, and he had already accepted an invitation to have discussions with farm producers from Eastern Ontario. He has assured us that he will try and return to Parliament as soon as possible. Should this debate continue late into the night, he will certainly be able to take part in it.

As a matter of fact, I do not think there is a single member who would dare blame the hon. Minister of Agriculture for carrying out his duties and acting quickly in any emergency. In fact, Madam Speaker, as I was listening to the trivial statements made by the hon. member for Joliette, to his unfounded accusations and partisan remarks, I felt there was no need for the Minister of Agriculture to be here and listen to all this in order to