

Meat Inspection Act

Mr. Don Boudria (Glengarry-Prescott-Russell): On behalf of my Party, Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to participate in the debate on Bill C-33. I listened attentively to the remarks of the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Blais) in which he referred to the outstanding reputation of Canada's meat inspection system. That is true. In my opinion, no one will question the fact that Canada's excellent meat inspection system is world famous.

As I was listening to the Hon. Member's remarks, Mr. Speaker, I had the impression that he was actually taking issue with the budget cut-back program of the Minister of Finance (Mr. Wilson) in which he raised the possibility of higher rates for inspecting meat and many other foodstuffs, which would have the effect of jeopardizing the meat inspection system that the Hon. Member so eloquently praised. I must say that I share his concern about the Minister of Finance's intention to go ahead with budget cut-backs and slash Government spending at the expense of Canadian farmers. I am glad to see that the Hon. Member for Bellechasse agrees with me that we cannot stand still, that we must protest vigorously to the Minister of Finance against these unacceptable increases which I mentioned earlier and about which the Hon. Member for Bellechasse is trying to convey the message that he does not quite understand what I am saying.

In any case, I agree with him that our meat inspection system is second to none and that we must keep it at any cost.

One of the obvious reasons for introducing this Bill in the House is that legislation concerning meat inspection must be made consistent with the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, particularly with respect to inspectors who, until now, could enter a private dwelling without a warrant or a court order on the pretext that meat had to be inspected. In my opinion, all Hon. Members will be glad to know that henceforth we will be in full compliance with the new Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. We are proud indeed to see that this new Bill is in keeping with the provisions of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

[*English*]

The provisions of Bill C-33 are such that they will prescribe by regulation certain inspection fees which the Minister will be able to levy on meat products and certain carcasses of meat products. While of course Members will be agreeable that there are certain inspection fees which should be levied on meat products that are imported into Canada, I have some difficulty with some of the proposals from the Government over the last few months, particularly as they apply to adding inspection fees of various kinds on different agricultural products.

We know that the Ontario Pork Council has severely objected to the proposal to have a 26-cent carcass inspection fee for hogs. The Ontario Cattlemen's Association has also protested, as have several other groups from across the country. These protests have come not only from meat products areas but from several other areas. The Horticultural Council, for

instance, has objected to fees being charged on agricultural products. The Feed Growers' Association has said that it will now have fees in the order of \$1,000 per grower.

I think we should seize this opportunity to remind the Government that if it is going to reduce the deficit, the last person who should be affected is the farmer. Farmers are very ill-equipped at the present time and generally are not in good financial situations. Farming is a capital-intensive industry with low profits. Especially at this time farmers are in very difficult positions and definitely cannot afford any increase in inspection fees. However, if the Government wants to levy fees on meat being imported into Canada, I must say I will not have too much difficulty with that proposition. We know that several meat products entering Canada do so at rates subsidized by foreign governments. This puts some of our farmers in difficulty, and perhaps it will serve as a lever to bring the prices slightly back up to where they should be, and therefore not continue the unfair competition we have.

I have a few issues relating to specific clauses of the Bill that I would like to raise with the Parliamentary Secretary. First, in terms of application, I would like to ask the Parliamentary Secretary about Section 20(b) of the Act. Perhaps he could indicate to us how the provisions concerning the suitability of persons operating registered establishments are to be put in practice. I have read the Bill. There is not too much mentioned in the Bill itself as to Section 20(b) and that particular aspect. The Minister referred to the suitability of individuals in his briefing notes.

What is deemed to be a suitable versus an unsuitable applicant? Are we referring to persons who may have—

An Hon. Member: No Liberals.

Mr. Boudria: I am glad the Hon. Member brought that up. He was just saying no Liberals. I was going to ask if this could perhaps lend itself to patronage. I was somewhat reluctant to bring it up in those terms but a Conservative Member in this House has brought it up. Perhaps the Member for Simcoe North (Mr. Lewis) does bring up an interesting point to which the Parliamentary Secretary could refer.

Are we referring here to people who have had a bad record in terms of being meat processing plant operators, individuals who could have been charged several times and who generally have failed to respect the law?

As much as we could be in agreement with that clause, Mr. Speaker, I am a bit at a loss to determine how we could reconcile that clause with the Charter of Rights. If someone were charged 20 years ago with a contravention of preceding legislation, would that individual be deemed unsuitable because of his past? If that is the case, are we again offending the Charter of Rights by suggesting that what someone may have done a number of years ago could be used against him or her in a future application? Perhaps the Parliamentary Secretary could comment upon that particular clause of the Bill.