

Supply

• (1605)

I want to congratulate him on behalf of all farmers in Quebec who are proud of the work done by the hon. member for Frontenac.

It is rather difficult to remain calm when speaking in this kind of debate. Especially when we hear from members on the government benches, although the same could be said of some Reform Party members, what I would qualify, without wishing to use unparliamentary terms, as outrageous statements from Liberal members and several members of the Reform Party.

I am referring more specifically, before I get to the gist of my speech, to what was said by the hon. member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, who in this very House accused all Bloc members of lying or saying the opposite of the truth, which apparently is parliamentary, and then, with the Minister of Agriculture, accused us of causing emotions to run high across this beautiful country of ours.

The hon. member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell is extremely good at saying just about anything without being too particular about how he says it. Everyone will recall, and this will go down in history as one of the achievements of the hon. member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, his speech in the House during the debate on back-to-work legislation to settle the railway dispute. The hon. member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell rose in the House to speak out loud and clear about what one of his constituents had told him which was, according to him, that shipping costs for soya beans had gone up 20 per cent because of this dispute. And he gave us his constituent's telephone number so that we could call him right away. Well, it transpired that the only element of truth in what was said by the hon. member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell was this telephone number. That was the only fact. The rest was a tissue of falsehoods. This was checked immediately by the hon. member for Berthier—Montcalm who called our Liberal colleague's constituent on the telephone.

This morning, or was it this afternoon, I also heard the hon. member for Lisgar—Marquette of the Reform Party say that Quebec benefited as a result of federal intervention, especially in the dairy sector. I would like to take a few minutes to clear up a few things.

As everybody in this House knows, I represent the riding of Mégantic—Compton—Stanstead where there is a large number of farmers, especially dairy farmers. Dairy farming is a very important industry, economically speaking. The economic spin-offs of dairy farming in my riding amount to tens of millions of dollars. As one can see, milk production is a very significant activity in Mégantic—Compton—Stanstead.

We are told that, should Quebec become sovereign, the rest of Canada will refuse to buy milk from Quebec. This is the kind of

blackmailing we are being subjected to, and of course, there is no intent, on the part of our colleagues who make this suggestion, to have feelings run high.

• (1610)

Very calmly, they are not trying to scare anyone; on the contrary, they just want to reassure us by saying that once Quebec is sovereign, there will be no more dealing with Quebec. This is what is being said in this House.

This seems to me to be utter nonsense. One must look at the facts. The facts are that trade between Quebec and Canada amounts to more than \$80 billion. For a large part, this trade is in agricultural products. In this area, Quebec shows an average deficit of more than \$800 million.

That is to say that Quebec buys from the rest of Canada more than it sells. So, if someone should be doing some blackmailing in the context of a sovereign Quebec, it certainly should not be the rest of Canada. This means that English Canada would decide, in cold blood, to stop buying milk from Quebec producers, while knowing that Quebec could buy its beef, grain and other foodstuff from other sources.

I am saying this again very seriously mostly for the benefit of farmers, the men and women who own farms worth hundreds of thousands of dollars, sometimes even more than one million dollars. Agriculture in Quebec is no small potatoes. It is a thriving industry. A very significant industry.

I am saying this for the benefit of these men and women, Quebec's sovereignty cannot have the impact Liberal and Reform members would like us to believe. With Canada showing an \$800 million deficit—and it is important to keep this figure in mind—in agriculture each and every year, Quebec is in a strong bargaining position when the time comes to negotiate with the rest of Canada.

The hon. member for Brome—Missisquoi stated in this House that the Quebec government was cutting funding to agricultural research and development. He asked us very seriously—probably confusing one level of government with the other because he is newly elected at the federal level—to take the matter up with the Government of Quebec so that the situation can be remedied.

I just want to point out to the hon. member for Brome—Missisquoi and all the hon. members of this House that the best solution to Quebec's budget problems is for Quebec to become sovereign. Quebec's share of the federal agriculture department's budget of more than \$2 billion should be \$500 million—that is how much should be spent in Quebec—but the figures prove otherwise. Instead of 25 per cent, we are actually getting 12 per cent; for research and development, it is more like 10 per cent.