

National Affairs by Claire Hoy ? He?s right, supply management should go

Having recently returned from an annual car trip to Texas, and in particular to various Houston supermarkets, your correspondent noticed two striking differences between their dairy sections and our local equivalents.

First, the price was just a fraction of what we're forced to pay for milk, cheese and other dairy products.

Second, the selection of various types and brands is absolutely enormous. Not to mention delightful for a foodie such as myself.

A good part of the reason for this disparity, of course, can be traced directly to the cowardice of our domestic politicians ? Liberals, Tories and New Democrats alike ? who continue to honor a supply management scheme to the benefit of a small group of wealthy dairy farmers to the detriment of all Canadian consumers, plus farmers who specialize in other crops or products.

The University of Calgary, for one, estimates that this government-sponsored scam ? which would likely be prosecuted as price-fixing and collusion if it weren't approved by the politicians ? costs each and every Canadian more than \$300 a year in buying such staples as milk, cheese, butter, eggs and chicken, a situation which obviously hits poorer people much harder than those who really don't need to worry about the cost of feeding their families.

This absurd situation was recently brought to the attention of consumers ? and immediately sparked all sorts of defensive rationale from politicians and the dairy lobbyists ? by none other than U.S. President Donald Trump who, whatever his other faults may be, was justified in railing against our system of preferential treatment for a small band of wealthy dairy farmers.

Canada's immediate reaction, of course, was that Trump had his facts wrong.

But even the Toronto Star ? which can't even spell the name Trump without inserting an insult of one kind or another ? conceded in an editorial that, oh my God, when it comes to dairy protectionism hurting consumers, Trump actually has a point.

Of course, The Star argued that it was accidental ? that Trump couldn't possibly understand what he's talking about. But it conceded that he did ?stumble onto a truth when he called supply management an ?unfair thing.' It is.?

Just to illustrate how far the Star (and most other mainline publications) will go to twist themselves into pretzels to criticize Trump, that same editorial, having conceded Trump had a point, nonetheless praised their hero, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, for dissenting.

?For domestic reasons,? they wrote, ?we should be transitioning away from supply management. But that move should not come as a capitulation to Trump's extemporaneous extortions.?

So even if Trump gets something right, it's best to defy him because, apparently, it's Trump. Really?

Meanwhile, back at the main point, i.e. this outrageous collusion between governments and the dairy lobby, the only current domestic politician with the guts to speak up on behalf of consumers is Tory leadership candidate Maxime Bernier (which would earn him my vote if I had a vote on the leadership.)

In an open letter to Trump in The Globe and Mail last week, Bernier wrote that Trump was right to dismiss our dairy supply management system as ?unfair? to the dairy farmers of Wisconsin ? which is what Trump specifically was addressing ? but ?You will excuse me if I say I am mostly sorry for a much larger group: the 35 million Canadians who are paying on average twice as much as they should for their eggs, chicken and dairy products . . .?

?I think it's very unfair that in order to keep a system that favors less than 10 per cent of Canadian farmers, our government has not been able to negotiate better trade deals for the other 90 per cent . . . or for other industrial sectors looking to export their goods.?(In agreeing with Trump on dairy, however, Bernier pointed out the same arguments could/should be made against the U.S. tariffs and quotas on softwood lumber, which not only means higher costs for Canadian consumers but an extra \$1,000 to Americans for a new home. What's good for the goose . . .)

The fact is, there is no justification ? none whatsoever ? for the system of tariffs and quotas which keeps our dairy prices high and virtually disqualifies any younger blood from getting into the business and introducing some competition.

For all the chatter we hear from politicians about their ?deep concerns? for the poor, surely their ongoing support of a system which penalizes those people for trying to feed absolute staples to their families is really the most wicked hypocrisy of all.

Just because it was Trump who pointed out this evil doesn't make it any less evil.

