

Alleged Failure to Aid Western Farmers

I think that is spelling it out very clearly.

Mr. Pepin: It might affect other people's operations, though.

Mr. Horner: I hear some comment from the Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce. It is a pleasure to see him in the house tonight. He was not here all afternoon but I will be pleased to hear his comments this evening.

Mr. Pepin: I will explain in a moment my reasons for being absent, which are as good as yours.

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, I should like to inform you that these interruptions are very noteworthy. I was on the agriculture committee that toured St. John's, Newfoundland, the bogs of inner Newfoundland, Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia, spent four days in the province of Quebec, and conducted extensive research into the problems faced by agriculture. I do not know where the Minister of Agriculture was but that is where I was.

Mr. Olson: I am not on the committee.

Mr. Horner: Excuse me; I mean the Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce.

Mr. Pepin: I went to an advisory council meeting this afternoon.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): I was here.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Béchard): Order. I point out to the members that it is not in order to interrupt an hon. member who has the floor.

Mr. Horner: I appreciate your remarks, Mr. Speaker, because my time is very limited. I was quoting the remarks of the Chairman of the Canadian Wheat Board, who continued:

I mean that it should be a tax on the flour rather than try to police what wheat goes into a mill for this use or that use. Everything that goes into domestic use should be taxed and the mill should get the wheat at the same price and then the government collects whatever the tax is going to be.

So let me clear up once and for all, Mr. Speaker, that there is no problem about instituting a two price system for Canadian wheat. The international market used to question such a system, but today it does not. The Chairman of the Canadian Wheat Board has said that the system could be implemented, that there would be no problem. The onus lies on the Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce and the Minister of Agriculture to sell the idea to their cabinet colleagues.

[Mr. Horner.]

The hon. member for Bruce (Mr. Whicher) outlined some of the difficulties he foresaw for western agriculture. I wish both him and the two ministers every success in selling the cabinet on a two price system. I did want to quote a statement to be found in the agriculture committee report to the effect that a two price system would not involve a substantial increase in the price of bread, but I cannot put my finger on the precise page. The Chairman of the Canadian Wheat Board suggested that the price of wheat would increase by \$1.20 a bushel, which in turn would mean an increase in the cost of bread of 2 cents a loaf. That should set aside any fear that may be in the mind of the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs (Mr. Basford); and evidence to this effect from the Chairman of the Canadian Wheat Board is to be found in report No. 41 of the committee proceedings.

Let me turn to what the government can do for agriculture. The Minister of Agriculture stated that no plan will be proceeded with until we are sure it fits into a long term program. Then, he went on boastfully to claim that everything was fine with regard to the livestock position generally, including cattle and hogs. The minister has told us that half the net farm cash proceeds in western Canada came from the sale of cattle and hogs. I ask, did the minister initiate any programs for western farmers before seeding time this spring? Did he make sure that programs would be introduced under which land might lie fallow or might be planted with grass in order to produce livestock? No. The government waited until after seeding time before contemplating action, and it was too late then. We had a brilliant task force that recommended a reduction of 10 million acres in wheat producing acreage. That was a 30 per cent reduction. What happened, Mr. Speaker? Farmers came to me and said, "All right, so this agricultural task force from Ottawa says we should reduce our wheat acreage by 10 million acres. What are we supposed to seed our land with?" The farmers were asking for assistance and advice but did not get any from the government. The Minister of Agriculture failed them, just as he failed to initiate programs of assistance. This is a government that sits on its hands. The government's attitude is, "Let's sit on our hands for another month. By that time it will be too late, and we will not need to assist farmers." In addition to our other problems we now have a problem with a government that sits on its hands and does not help farmers.