

Adjournment Debate

I want the Government to tell us which of these recommendations are Government policy. I also want Conservative Members from Saskatchewan to give us their views on the recommendations in this report. Let me refer to a few of those recommendations. The report recommends changing the tax system for farmers from a cash basis to an accrual basis. This would amount to an additional federal tax of \$100 million a year from the farmers of Canada.

The report also recommends eliminating the farm fuel rebates, which are worth some \$130 million a year. This would increase the tax by \$1 million a year on one hand and eliminate the farm fuel rebate by \$130 million a year on the other. That amounts to approximately one quarter billion dollars of increased payments by the farmers of Canada.

Another recommendation in the task force report is to increase the crop insurance premiums. Another is to change the cash advance system as we know it. Currently, a farmer receives a cash advance interest free. The recommendation by this particular task force is that the farmer pay the going interest rate on a cash advance. That will hurt not only farmers in my riding, but farmers right across western Canada. The Government is also talking about phasing out the Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Act which is, again, a popular and worth-while program. In a place like Indian Head where there are agricultural farms, eliminating this program will do tremendous damage, not just to the town and that community, but to a number of farmers in Saskatchewan.

• (1810)

Another recommendation is to prevent the creation of new marketing boards. Why this recommendation was made, I am not sure. Surely that decision should be made by the farmers of this country, not by some Government bureaucrats or private sector people who advise the Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. Nielsen). Another recommendation is the unprecedented "rationalization" of prairie rail network, the introduction of variable freight rates and the removal of guarantees and phase out of rehabilitation of the branch lines which are so important to the prairies.

Another recommendation of the task force report is to privatize the Farm Credit Corporation. Farmers in my riding are concerned about that because they have enough problems already with the private banks, let alone privatizing the Farm Credit Corporation. Another recommendation which concerns farmers is the closing down of the Port of Churchill for the export of grain. I know you, Mr. Speaker, are a member from the Toronto area, but I am sure even you would be concerned about some of these recommendations becoming law. My purpose this afternoon is to draw attention to the recommendations made in the Nielsen task force report and to make an appeal to my fellow Members of Parliament from Saskatchewan who sit on the Government side to speak out on these issues. We need the cash advance system as it is today for our farmers. We need the PFRA. It serves a very useful purpose.

We need the farm fuel tax rebate of \$130 million because of rising farm input costs and falling farm income. We need to

keep the tax system as it is rather than raising an extra \$100 million from the farmers by changing the tax system. We do not want to privatize the Farm Credit Corporation. We do not want to close the Port of Churchill. These matters are very important to farmers in western Canada.

In the last 15 or 16 years, farmers in western Canada have seen three important task forces on agriculture. The first task force was in the early 1970s when the Hon. Otto Lang was Minister of Transport. That report recommended eventually phasing out about two thirds of the farms because they were, according to the experts, inefficient. The farmers of this country rallied forth and fought against the recommendations of that task force. Later on we had another task force which recommended abolishing the Crow rate, which was a very important rate for the movement of our grain to various ports in Canada. It was considered by many farmers in the West as part of our deal for coming into Confederation.

Now we have a third task force, which is again insensitive to the needs of the farmers of western Canada. It is written by a group of men—and they are all men—not one of whom is a farmer. They are all businessmen, bureaucrats or retired people who are not active farmers. I therefore call upon the Government to give us as soon as it can its response to the task force on agriculture because a lot of farmers are nervous about what is going to happen. They do not know that the future holds. They want to know where the Government of Canada stands. I appeal to the Government not to spread unnecessary panic among the farmers of Canada. If it disagrees with these recommendations, then tell us. If it agrees with some of them, then tell us in order that we can respond. That is all I am asking in this particular debate today.

Mr. Pierre Blais (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Agriculture): Mr. Speaker, in response to the question asked by the Hon. Member for Yorkton-Melville (Mr. Nystrom), we are not considering the cancellation of the cash advance program to western grain farmers. Currently, departmental staff are reviewing the program in order to bring forward proposals to amend the Prairie Grain Advance Payments Act. We plan to have the amendments in place prior to the commencement of the 1986-87 crop year.

Our long-term plans include a complete re-write of the Act. This will be accomplished by reviewing the basic principles and by assessing the future needs of the western grain industry. When completed, the new Act will be more responsive to the future development and requirements of the western grain industry.

• (1815)

[Translation]

As to the report mentioned by my colleague, the Government asked an independent committee to make recommendations. We have just received them, we will study them and seek advice. I would think that the hallmark of this Government has been to consult with Canadians on each legislative measure we have taken in the last 18 months. In that respect we have no lesson to take from anybody. We have done our work, we have done our duty.