

Supply

Madam Deputy Speaker: This point of order that is not a point of order is really taking a lot of time. If the hon. member for Thunder Bay—Atikokan who had asked to be heard before would agree, I think we should go to questions or comments following the speech by the hon. minister and get into substance instead of procedure.

Mr. Angus: Madam Speaker, I do wish to rise on the point of order because there is one element that has not been offered to you for your consideration and that of the government.

The motion as it is written—

An hon. member: We have already ruled on that. Are you challenging the Chair?

An hon. member: Why don't you listen?

Mr. Angus: Madam Speaker, if the hon. member would listen instead of bellowing he might learn something. What I want to offer to the Chair—and I did not notice that you had ruled, you just wanted to move on to questions and comments—this House—

An hon. member: The Chair ruled on the point of order.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. member for Athabasca is making my job more difficult than it should be. The hon. member for Thunder Bay—Atikokan.

Mr. Angus: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and in no way am I challenging your decision, if it in fact has been made. What I want to remind the House is that this House is its own master. Irrespective of whatever the convention has been, by motion this House, with unanimous consent, can do as it pleases. In the motion offered by my colleague it says very clearly that this House does not consider this to be a question of confidence in the government.

Madam Speaker, I suggest to you that the motion as worded gets the government off the hook. It was offered in a spirit not of partisanship but as a way to have this whole House follow the example of the standing committee.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I will, if I may, read only three lines from Beauséjour, which says:

The determination of the issue of confidence in the government is not a question of procedural order and does not involve the interpretive responsibilities of the Speaker.

So it comes back to what I said earlier, that the government and the government only can decide whether a question is or is not a question of confidence. I would imagine that all parties will at one point talk about it and make their own decisions. But this is not something that the Speaker can do for the House.

We will go into questions or comments. The hon. member for Algoma.

• (1150)

Mr. Maurice Foster (Algoma): Madam Speaker, although I do not think the government would have fallen if this motion had been carried, I think it becomes a fruitless debate to spend very much time arguing. If the government decides that this is a question of confidence, then it is going to vote against it. I think your ruling is sound there.

I am really interested to know something from the minister. He certainly gave a great description of the problems that the world faces with the EEC support programs and so on. I think the key issue after all is that he is the Minister of Grains and Oilseeds, and along with the Minister of Agriculture, carries the prime responsibility to cabinet. I am encouraged if press reports are right, that he has been waiting on his colleagues in cabinet to find additional funding. Although the minister says that he can prove that the assistance in the 1990-91 crop year was equivalent to GRIP, I do not think he can persuade many farmers of that. If you look at the government's own data book on farm incomes and financial conditions, you will see that during 1990, government support programs dropped by some \$1.275 billion. Of course, this spring we have seen the dramatic drop in the price of corn and other crops which carries over into that crop year.

I think it is generally felt by the farming community that of the emergency cash assistance which they had expected and hoped would be paid this spring, only a reasonably small portion of that, some \$300 million, will be forthcoming through the NISA program. I am interested to know, since the press reports indicate that the minister has taken the issue to cabinet and is being supported by the hon. member from Regina, the hon. member from southern Saskatchewan and the rural caucus, how much progress he is making with regard to getting emergency financial assistance and whether that can be put in the hands of farmers in the very near future? That is really the basic issue of this debate, not