

Adjournment Debate

the announcement by the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) of a \$1 billion assistance program for grain producers. I asked whether the Government had the billion dollars in this year's fiscal accounts.

The basis of the question was a growing belief in the Canadian agricultural sector that the delay in the pay-out being made to farmers was because the Government did not want to find the money and did not intend to make payments until after April 1 of next year, in other words into the next fiscal year.

The Minister of Finance (Mr. Wilson) to whom I directed my question refused to answer it. He left it to the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Wise) who also did not answer it.

On the basis of this non-answer, we are forced to make certain assumptions. For example, if the money were available, we are sure the Minister of Finance would have bounced to his feet and assured everyone that the money was in place and that they were only awaiting the method of payment to be decided before making those payments to farmers who have been waiting for the last eight weeks. The Minister of Finance avoided answering the question, as did the Minister of Agriculture. Since neither Minister rose to assure us, we could only assume that there will be no payment until the next fiscal year.

In other words, producers will be required to wait until after April 1 and, knowing that the Estimates will not be passed until May 24, possibly into May or June before they can expect any help.

The Prime Minister promised the \$1 billion during the recent Saskatchewan election campaign. At that time it was supposed to be a package to counter depressed prices created by the trade war between the United States and the European community.

During succeeding weeks we watched the Government gradually withdraw from the possibility of paying out the money, until we are not sure just exactly whether or not it intends to pay it. The succeeding weeks have been a slow process to let down the West.

First, the Minister of Agriculture told us that it was not only for the West, that it was for all Canadian grain growers. Second, we were told that the method of payment was slowing down the process, that there was no action because they could not decide how to pay it. Finally, we were told that the package put before the Minister by the agricultural community was acceptable but that farmers would not receive it before the end of the year. That is within a month, and now we know it is an impossibility. There is no chance of the Minister doing what he said he would do—first, have it before the end of October; then, have it before the end of November; and now, have it before the end of December. Farmers who believed the Prime Minister and looked for help this year will be disappointed.

This means that many farmers will be that much deeper in debt. Some of them will be forced out of business because the money is not forthcoming. It would seem that the chances of them getting the money this fiscal year are becoming more remote.

● (1825)

The need for the money is beyond question. Without prompt support, much of the agricultural industry may disappear. The grain producers have the right to know when they can expect their portion of that billion dollars, if it is going to come. They have been told it is in exchange for the CF-18 contract which did not go to the West. Work on that contract will be two years away. Will the farmers have to wait that long before they get some action on the promised billion dollars? I am again giving the Government an opportunity to assure the farmers of western and eastern Canada that the billion dollars will be available for them to pay off some of the debts which are facing them right now.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre H. Vincent (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Finance): Madam speaker, I welcome this opportunity to take part in this discussion and outline the ongoing efforts of this Government to put into place a fair and equitable assistance program for Canadian farmers hurt by the international subsidy war.

As Members of this House well know, the massive subsidies being offered by the United States and European Economic Community have drastically reduced the world price of grains.

Although Canada is not a part of the subsidy war, our grain and oilseed farmers have been caught in the crossfire.

The Government of Canada has worked strenuously at the international level to bring an end to these unfair subsidy practices. And we will continue to represent our farmers' interests loud and clear on the international scene until fairness and sense have been restored to world trade.

But in the meantime, our grain farmers need special cash flow assistance to help them through this difficult period.

That is why this Government has made a commitment to the most substantial assistance initiative ever undertaken in Canada on behalf of farmers.

The commitment is there, and it is firm. But it is important to satisfy ourselves that the assistance will be delivered in a fair and equitable way. Therefore, the Minister of Agriculture has invested time in consulting with the provinces and farm leaders.

The investment has paid off. As a result of two meetings with farm leaders, a consensus was reached on the principles of a formula for distributing the assistance.

I would like to commend the Minister, and the farm leaders, for their hard work in reaching this important consensus.