

Oral Questions

Hon. E. F. Whelan (Minister of Agriculture): Madam Speaker, I now remember his first question. It was about the AgriBond policy. That policy has been suggested by farm organizations, by Members of this Party, and by Members of his own Party. Anyone who can claim to be the originator of it has got to be pretty fantastic, Madam Speaker, as far as I am concerned, because that was suggested by many people, many years ago, and it is still under consideration.

In reply to the second speech he made about whether we were going to have some kind of program for the red meat industry, I do not know if he was in the House earlier when one of his colleagues said he did not want any more Government interference or regulations whatsoever, calling it dictatorial. The Hon. Member is now asking me to interfere with the red meat industry. Maybe I should not be doing anything. The provinces are certainly getting ready to interfere with the red meat industry, if they are going to come up with something in that meeting in Regina. I proposed something to them four years ago that is pretty much the same as they are proposing at the present time, and they took over four years to say no to it. Now they are talking about accepting it. If they do, boy, will I say hurrah, Madam Speaker.

PAYMENTS UNDER WESTERN GRAIN STABILIZATION PROGRAM

Mr. Len Gustafson (Assiniboia): Madam Speaker, I have a question for the Minister of Agriculture which pertains to the low incomes of farmers at this present time. According to a release from the United Grain Growers today, farm income will be down 28 per cent due to lower wheat prices and increased costs of production. The Minister knows that in the recent budget there was absolutely nothing for the western farmer, and that takes into consideration the \$400 million that it will cost them for the loss of the Crow rate.

With regard to the Western Grain Stabilization Program, under which there is \$451 million of the farmers' money in that account, is his Government going to make a payment to the farmers now when it is so needed, how much will it be, and when will it be?

Hon. E. F. Whelan (Minister of Agriculture): Madam Speaker, if the legislation triggered the payment, because of low commodity prices, the Hon. Member knows full well, there would be a payment, when it is all tabulated and has gone through the system. But when he talks about how bad off they are, is he suggesting we interfere in the private grain trade and do something about world commodity prices? I have a letter from the head of the United Grain Growers. He used to be an adviser on the Agriculture Stabilization Board and I know him very well. In his letter he states it is mostly blamed on low world commodity prices. Is the Hon. Member suggesting we interfere in that area again?

REQUEST THAT FARMERS BE ALLOWED TO OPT OUT OF PROGRAM

Mr. Len Gustafson (Assiniboia): The Minister knows that was not the question I asked him. I asked him whether there was going to be a payment.

Farmers, first of all, paid a levy of \$500 per producer. Then it was increased to \$900 for each producer. Now, I understand, it is going to be increased to \$1,200 to the producer. Will the Government consider allowing farmers to opt out of the program if the farmers are not going to see it is a reasonable program? Many of them, had they invested their money in the bank at today's interest rates, would have a lifetime savings policy.

Hon. E. F. Whelan (Minister of Agriculture): Madam Speaker, the Hon. Member knows that farmers joined that plan voluntarily. The vast majority of grain farmers in Western Canada still belong to that plan, and will belong to that plan. He wants them to be opting in and out of it. There can be no kind of a program if, one day, they decide to be in it and the next day out of it. What kind of plan, Madam Speaker, would that be? There has to be some stability to it.

The Hon. Member knows that it is one of the best plans any grain growing group has in the whole world. The United States does not have anything that good for its grain farmers, plus the fact they do not have a crop insurance plan. We have such a plan in Canada. We put into his province about \$80 million last year in federal funding to pay half of the crop insurance premiums. We spent more in his province, Madam Speaker, than the Province of Saskatchewan did last year, by about some \$50 million. The Hon. Member says we do not care about western agriculture. Let the figures show the facts.

IMPACT OF GILSON COMMISSION RECOMMENDATIONS

Mr. Vic Althouse (Humboldt-Lake Centre): Madam Speaker, my question also is directed to the Minister of Agriculture and concerns a study made public recently by the Chase Econometrics Institute in the United States. It was a study concerning the impact on Canadian agriculture of implementing the Crow changes that Gilson recommended. Since the Chase Econometrics Study shows that the changes in the Crow rate proposed by Gilson will negatively affect all of eastern Canadian agriculture, British Columbia agriculture, and most of the prairie agriculture with the exception of a few highly specialized feeding operations, will the Minister tell the House what his position is on the Crow change that it appears to impact negatively on virtually every sector of Canadian agriculture?

• (1440)

Hon. E. F. Whelan (Minister of Agriculture): Madam Speaker, the Hon. Member has not changed his opinion from the time when changing the Crowsnest Pass rate was first talked about. What he says about it having a negative impact on every sector of agriculture is just not so, and he knows it. There must be a change in the rate if agriculture is going to