

*The Address—Mr. Murta*

contention that it has not been working satisfactorily. Some economists who have looked into the matter have stated that most of the money is not getting to the farmers. It is evident that the system is unfair because non-wheat producers receive benefit from it in the same way as wheat producers. It is plain that by making the payments only to wheat farmers, the government would be encouraging more farmers to go into wheat production. I believe the government must challenge this assumption. The two-price system is a two-price system of payments to all western farmers. Western agriculture would be better served, I believe, by a more realistic pricing mechanism. The two-price system was basically brought in as a political gimmick or a sham, to try to entice western Canada's support for the Liberal government. Of course, it failed.

This brings me to another suggestion, Mr. Speaker. If the government truly desires a stable economy in western agriculture, I believe they should consider a system of floor prices for grain. Such a system would ensure that the price for a particular grain would never fall below a minimum established by consultation with the agriculture department, producers organizations and grain interests—the grain industry itself. Farmers would be guaranteed a certain amount for their products and if the world demand was such that their products could be sold at a higher price, then they could profit. If prices fell below this level, the government could ensure that the farmer still received a fair return for his production. I am thinking in this instance of our so-called Wheat Board grains. I believe that such a concept would ensure more rational planning in our economy. A floor price for grains would do more for farmers than any of the short-term, hastily conceived plans put forward by this government and, in the long run, ensure more valuable results.

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It is apparent that a crisis is facing the farming community which will deepen if more young farmers are not attracted to the industry. To this end, I suggest that more and easier credit be made available to young people wishing to enter farming. I believe that emphasis must be placed on people entering agriculture rather than on speeding up their exit from agriculture. At the same time, several departments of government must concern themselves with improving the quality of life in rural areas. The departments that would be concerned, I suggest, are those involved in transport, agriculture, fisheries, regional development, health and welfare, urban affairs and housing. These departments ought to establish a decentralized authority for the various regions of Canada and they should be responsible for ensuring the continued maintenance of services as well as the high quality of life in rural areas. There are many people in urban areas of Canada who are becoming increasingly interested in such advantages of rural life as clean air and water and an abundance of recreational space, to say nothing of plain room for moving around. I think we must make sure that there is adequate planning to support these objectives.

Where possible new industries should be set up in a rural area. Such development should capitalize on the advantages of that area. The best opportunity for this type of development is in the field of food processing. When these products are processed near their source they

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take on an added value, hence returning more money to the grain farmer and livestock feeder. There is an added benefit, that of starting an important and natural secondary industry in our rural areas, namely, processing. I think that this is within our grasp.

It would also be wise at this time to examine the government's policy respecting the Canadian Wheat Board. The Board has tended to be under the thumb or jurisdiction of the federal government, which has not made it as responsive as it ought to be to the needs of those people it was designed to serve, our agricultural producers. The government should act in a way which would increase the involvement of the producer in those decisions which affect them. I am talking of decisions the Wheat Board might make. And government should consider not only the Wheat Board; it should re-examine its basic philosophy regarding supply management.

It is my understanding, Mr. Speaker, that the present Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Whelan) is a strong advocate of marketing boards. I believe most members in this House would agree that marketing boards are fine if used exclusively for the promotion and sale of our agricultural products. I do not know of any product that could not benefit from a more aggressive marketing approach. Yet all too often these boards fall into traps created by inward-looking, protectionist politicians and bureaucrats, and become burdened under quotas and controls. From the minister's past history, it is clear that he could easily fall into this trap. Only time and legislation will tell, assuming that the members of the NDP, my hon. friends to my left, allow him enough time to remain as Minister of Agriculture to enable him to consider some of the questions I have asked today.

One of the most important areas that the Canadian agricultural industry must consider today is the area involving the selling or exporting of its products in world markets. I said earlier that our present sales are buoyant because we are benefiting from someone else's misfortunes. At the same time remember that the people in the United States are talking about increasing their total exports of agricultural produce this coming year by 28 per cent. Great Britain has entered the Common Market, so we shall lose some of our preferential status. If we look at Pacific rim countries to which we sell oil seeds, rapeseed, grain and other products, we can see that the continued prosperity of our agricultural industry rests on very, very aggressive selling approaches in those countries. You can be sure, Mr. Speaker, that if we do not pursue markets aggressively, our good friends to the south, the Americans, will. They have demonstrated over and over again that they will do so.

At the same time, we must display a good deal of caution when we talk about marketing and the marketing board approach for agriculture. The basic philosophy behind all agricultural legislation must be that the agricultural producer shall be able to function with the greatest freedom possible in the market place. The government's main obligation ought to be creating a climate in which all segments of the agricultural industry can work together, and in which government and the industry can complement each other.