

Business of Supply

not continue much longer. Before I close there are several points I want to stress to the government. The situation in western Canada is very serious, and time is running out. I believe it is time the government got off the cultural kick it is on and got back to the bread and butter issues facing this nation.

When people see their lifetime work going down the drain, they become desperate. This is happening to the farmers and people of western Canada. They are fed-up with talk of Quebec separation and ask what is the point of saving Canada if we cannot survive economically in the west. No matter what meeting I attended during the Christmas recess, I found this feeling. This is not meant as a threat that western Canada wants to separate. The people there feel, as we all feel, that Canada is a great nation with a wonderful future. However, let me again stress to the government that the situation in western Canada is critical, and it is a shame that this should happen because of lack of action by the government. The government seems to have two speeds in facing up to agricultural problems—slow and very slow. Let us have immediate action from this government to alleviate the serious situation in western Canada.

Mr. Stan Schumacher (Palliser): Mr. Speaker, during my few remarks this evening I do not intend to add to the waves of criticism that have been washing over the Canadian Wheat Board in recent months. I believe there are faults both in the make-up of the board and in the manner of its operation. Many of these faults have already been mentioned. It is my firm conviction that the board has been largely the scapegoat for the shortcomings of others, notably a long line of Liberal ministers whose only contribution in recent years has been to manipulate the Canadian Wheat Board for purely political advantage.

• (9:30 p.m.)

The real culprit in bringing Canadian agriculture, and western grain producing agriculture in particular, to its present critical state is the Liberal Party that turned its back on this country's agricultural community deliberately and which has kept it turned for the past five years or more. The sorry mess in which we find ourselves today is as much due to the inadequacies of the present Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Olson) as to any faults in our system of marketing grain.

[Mr. Stewart (Marquette).]

Instead of spending his time trying to sell the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) and the cabinet to the west and trying to engineer the merger of the provincial wing of his new party with his old party, he should have been selling the west to this administration, which in so far as action or interest is concerned appears to be completely ignorant that the west exists within confederation. It is apparent from the attitude of this government to the west, and people and things western, that the Prime Minister's Canada ends at the Lakehead.

As long as we have a federal system of buying, handling and selling our wheat, as long as the whole apparatus is dependent upon the government of the day, it will continue to be effective or ineffective in direct proportion to the amount of importance and support accorded it by Ottawa. We could have the best and most up-to-date grain marketing set-up in the world, but it would still be unsatisfactory as long as the federal government continued to callously disregard the needs of the agricultural industry and gave it no priority among the items of national business. I suggest, therefore, the first and most necessary thing Parliament must do is generate a real and informed concern within this government for agriculture. Then, and then only, will we be able to get anywhere in completely overhauling and modernizing our system of marketing Canadian grains.

In respect of the grain industry, the fact is that while the primary producers, the farmers, have taken giant strides forward in adapting modern technology and methods to their end of the business, the rest of it has remained in the horse and buggy era of the 1920's and 1930's. As was pointed out by the hon. member for Dauphin (Mr. Ritchie), farmers have increased their per capita productivity at a tremendous rate which surpasses that of any other industrial classification in Canada. Yet the system of marketing their output—and in the area of grain-handling the government has denied the farmers any responsibility—remains archaic. This system of marketing is not only cumbersome and ineffective but is petrified in a mould that could operate at all only in the best of all seller's markets. It is useless in the world market place of today and in a market that has become, and is likely to remain in the foreseeable future, a buyer's market.

This is clearly demonstrated by considering the process by which Canadian grain is