

Business of Supply

Mr. Douglas (Assiniboia): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for Lisgar (Mr. Muir) has intimated that I said there would be a final payment. I did not say any such thing.

Mr. Muir (Lisgar): I took the hon. member to intimate that there would be a final payment. When we read *Hansard* I think we will see that is the inference he was making. The Minister without Portfolio (Mr. Lang) in charge of the Wheat Board approached this subject cautiously the other day. However, he left the impression that he believed the assumption that there would be no final payment was correct. Furthermore, since the initial payment basis for No. 1 Northern at the Lakehead was reduced from \$1.70 last year to \$1.50 for this crop season, farm income is reduced at this critical stage and works a real hardship on farmers who because of lack of space were unable to fill their quota before the end of the last crop year.

The announcement by the manager of the Farm Credit Corporation in Saskatchewan that payment arrears in that province were running at about 20 per cent of outstanding loans, compared with less than 1 per cent during the previous 15 years, is a sad commentary on the situation in the prairies. This unhappy situation is compounded by the fact that some farm equipment dealers are barely hanging on and others have already given up the ghost. When the lack of orders begins to be felt in eastern Canada, this will no longer be just a regional problem; it will become a matter of national concern. The opposition has tried many times to point this out, but the government refuses to listen. All available statistics would seem to indicate that a further reduction of wheat acreage is desirable, but at least up to the present neither the government nor any of its appointed boards or commissions have been able to offer alternatives that could achieve this objective without causing embarrassing surpluses in other grains.

Short-term objectives such as feeding more hogs, or long-term objectives such as raising more cattle, may be ways to spread the risk or, to put it more appropriately, to diversify farm operations; but they do nothing to meet the pressing problem of cash shortage which conceivably could reach crisis proportions before seeding. The federal government must accept responsibility in this area if agriculture is to remain a viable industry and thousands of farmers are not put out of business

[Mr. Muir (Lisgar).]

because they are unable to sell enough of their products to pay expenses. I need hardly suggest to the government how this could be done; there are many precedents which the government could follow in regard to assistance for the agricultural industry.

Assistance to help establish industry in various parts of the country is a continuing program. A classic example is the subsidy paid to the automotive industry in working out the U.S.-Canada automotive agreement, and the subsequent payments that were made to that industry last year. A comparable amount paid to western agriculture in the form of acreage payments would give that industry a much needed boost and the nation as a whole would reap dividends. While the government hopefully, may be giving serious consideration to this suggestion which has been brought to its attention on several occasions by members of the opposition, I hope that in the interim everything possible will be done to open quotas in order to make available much needed cash.

The minister has told us he is going across the country talking to the farmers about their problems. He invited members of the opposition to join him in this so-called crusade. I suggest, Mr. Speaker, that the farmers of western Canada are thoroughly fed-up with talk by ministers, government members and commissions, and are looking for action from those who are responsible for the transportation, storage, distribution and sale of grain. In this respect, no amount of government waffling, no amount of academic discourse from the minister, and no further delay can relieve the government of its responsibility to adopt policies which will enable agriculture to remain solvent in the face of disaster.

● (8:40 p.m.)

Mr. John Burton (Regina East): Mr. Speaker, when the Minister without Portfolio, the member for Saskatoon-Humboldt (Mr. Lang), spoke this afternoon in the debate, we heard the same soothing words that we have heard from government benches for the past year and a half, a cover-up operation for the inaction of Liberal government policy or failure to take concrete action to help the western farmer deal adequately with the present crisis. He invited members of the House and people in the west to join in the challenging task of coming up with changes to improve the present system; then he made a call for efficiency.