

Supply

It seems to me that the whole free trade deal militates against orderly marketing on the prairies. But we see this decision with regard to oats as being perhaps the first chink in the dismantling of the Canadian Wheat Board because clearly the large grain companies in the United States have indicated they want to get rid of it. I would just like to hear the hon. member's comments with regard to that decision.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): It is an important question, therefore I will allow another minute or so for the hon. member to answer. Again, I would say to the hon. member for Prince Albert that he had better move back one more seat, otherwise he will not be recognized next time.

Mr. Hovdebo: Mr. Speaker, it is, possibly, the first overt attack on the Canadian Wheat Board, I agree with the member on that. It is not, however, the first attack on orderly marketing or on supply management marketing, which is the basic structural part of orderly marketing in this country. The government will tell you that consultation took place. The consultation showed that a large portion of the organizations were against the idea and the grassroots of the farm community was against any weakening of orderly marketing.

Consultation, in the minds of this government, is to talk to the farmers, listen to them, and then do what it intended to do anyway.

Hon. Charles Mayer (Minister of Western Economic Diversification and Minister of State (Grains and Oilseeds)): Mr. Speaker, I have listened carefully to the speeches that have been made here this morning. In so doing, you realize why a lot of people think this place is so irrelevant. If we would listen to the Leader of the Opposition and the spokesman for the NDP who just concluded speaking, we would think that farming in Canada was going to cease to exist.

Certainly there are problems in Canadian agriculture. There have been problems and there will continue to be problems. But to suggest, as the Leader of the Opposi-

tion did twice, that we are started on the road to agricultural dependency—and by that I take it he means dependency for food on another country, namely the United States—is absolute nonsense.

I have never heard such foolishness coming from anybody in the House with regard to agriculture as I heard from the Leader of the Opposition this morning.

I listened to him very carefully. I could not detect one positive thing that he said that we had done. If he did indicate such a thing, I missed it. Certainly, in all the initiatives that we have taken agriculturally, there should have been something that he would have been able to find a little bit of favour with. If he could not, it would have been very nice to have him suggest some alternatives as to what in fact we should be doing. I heard none of that.

In lieu of that I guess I have to look at the record of what the previous government did, of which the Leader of the Opposition was a member. Some of us remember back to the days of the early 1970s when we had a situation fairly similar to what we have experienced here in the last four or five years when we had surpluses of grain and not enough market. The international wheat agreement was in the process of winding down for the simple reason that nobody wanted to pay any attention to it. It was a voluntary agreement, as a lot of international agreements are. Canada lived by, if you will, the spirit, and certainly the letter, of that agreement longer than anybody else. But in response to that the previous government took us right out of the international wheat market, and got us into what was called the LIFT program.

If you remember, Mr. Speaker, in the early 1970s Canada was producing about 18 million tonnes of wheat. With the LIFT program we faced a difficult international situation, no question about it. I can remember oats being sold for three bushels for a dollar, barley selling for 35 to 50 cents a bushel. We faced a very difficult situation.