

• (3:50 p.m.)

The Prime Minister spoke a good deal about the difficulty of working out a policy that does not involve farmers who have lots of assets but are strapped for cash. These farmers are in their present situation because they did what they were urged to do. They improved their method of production, they bought equipment, and perhaps they bought some land. Are we going to sit back in this parliament and see some of the best farmers in the west destroyed while the Prime Minister figures out some way of making certain that farmers who have substantial assets, but are badly strapped for cash, do not get any assistance from the government?

What we are talking about is the saving of an industry from facing grave difficulties. I suggest that what the Prime Minister said is quite irrelevant to the issue, and that these farmers may be in dire need of assistance. If they do not receive it agriculture in this country may receive a very heavy blow.

A variety of programs might have been adopted as an emergency measure. It might have been possible to work out a program with regard to payment for storage on the farm. This would have had the merit of paying for service rendered by the farmers in preserving an asset expected to be of value. I think the time has come when there is very little choice available to the government except to resort to some form of acreage payment, which has the merit of getting cash into the hands of the farmers quickly.

The Prime Minister spoke about a program of income support for farmers. When he was chided a few minutes ago for not having carried this program out, he said, "We did". I think he would have a very difficult time convincing members of this house that his pledge was carried out, and a much more difficult time convincing farmers in the western part of the country that he carried out his commitment, or even that he commenced to carry it out. The best example of this is the fact that the submission to the government, made by the Canadian Federation of Agriculture as long ago as May 28 has so far received no answer.

I think it is very clear that the government of Canada is taking the attitude that the present difficulties are entirely due to international developments beyond its control. I do not accept that. I think the Prime Minister was right when he said a year ago that Canada has not done an adequate job in selling

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wheat. I think that that statement which was true a year ago is even more true today.

The Prime Minister is back from his lecture tour in the west. He talked tough to the prairie farmers for the benefit of the eastern audiences. The western farmers certainly do not need to be told about the hard realities in the long term or in the short run. But they need to be told about the plans that this government has to be of assistance to them.

At a time of very serious uncertainty regarding agriculture, the government in the last months has simply added to the uncertainty. The Prime Minister spoke about cut-backs in wheat production, but no one has indicated what policy the government has to encourage alternatives to grain production if there is to be a cut-back in it. The Prime Minister proposed, apparently offhandedly, to pay farmers a salary for life under the condition that they surrender their land to the state. The Prime Minister continues to suggest that the farmers do not understand the national problems, but he does so without giving any indication that he understands the farmers' problems.

Parliament wants to know what emergency program the government plans to adopt to meet the short term crisis when the government will begin to implement this program, and when it will tell parliament what it proposes to do. We and the country generally have been asking for this for months, and we received only evasions.

Inflation is no answer. The government's anti-inflationary program is no excuse. The fact that some of these farmers have substantial assets but no cash is no excuse. This is no excuse for allowing the industry to get into deeper and deeper difficulties, and allowing many of our best farmers to go under economically. The fact that the international difficulties have increased in depth is no excuse for sitting back and refusing to deal with an emergency which exists in this country today.

I say to the Prime Minister and the responsible minister in this government: Act, and you will receive the support of members of this house. Act to meet a serious situation. The time is long past when it is sufficient simply for a Prime Minister of this country to ask questions, either in this house or on the farms of this country. What we need is action, and we expect it.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.