

Inquiries of the Ministry

Hon. D. S. Harkness (Minister of Agriculture): Perhaps I could reply to this question. Dr. Stewart and the commission have been carrying on an active investigation of this matter, as I think the hon. member knows. The commission held hearings in the western provinces first of all, and then moved to the maritime provinces. During the summer months they have been doing a considerable amount of investigatory work. The public hearings will be resumed this fall.

GRAIN**DEFICIENCY PAYMENTS—ORGANIZATION OF MASS DELEGATION TO OTTAWA**

On the orders of the day:

Mr. Hazen Argue (Assiniboia): Mr. Speaker, I wish to direct a question to the Minister of Trade and Commerce arising out of the very far-reaching and extraordinary decision taken recently by the Saskatchewan federation of agriculture, namely that a mass delegation be organized to go to Ottawa because of the failure of the government to make a statement on deficiency payments arising out of its promises in that regard.

Hon. Gordon Churchill (Minister of Trade and Commerce): I am waiting, because you have not put the question yet.

Mr. Fleming (Eglinton): You have made your speech. Now what is the question?

Mr. Argue: I thought the minister heard my question.

Mr. Churchill: No.

Mr. Argue: My question was whether or not the minister's attention had been drawn to a far-reaching and extraordinary decision taken a few days ago by the Saskatchewan federation of agriculture, namely to organize a mass delegation to go to Ottawa because the government had failed to announce its policy with regard to deficiency payments, particularly in view of the government's many promises in that regard. I asked for comment, but if the minister does not care to comment I ask him when the government is going to make an announcement on deficiency payments, and whether he has had any word of such a mass delegation being organized.

Mr. Churchill: I have no hesitation about commenting on any proposition or question put forward by the hon. member for Assiniboia. I am quite prepared to deal with him on any occasion. This problem of deficiency payments has been drawn to my attention very forcefully by practically all the members of this house who come from western Canada. The hon. member for Assiniboia is certainly

the last one to mention it to me today. He has sent me a clipping from the *Moose Jaw Times-Herald* of Saturday, July 26, which reports that the president of the Saskatchewan farm union described the discussions which the interprovincial farm union council held with the federal government and then, in quotation marks, follows the comment of the S.F.A. secretary:

Both farm officials concurred that promises of deficiency payments had been made, but apparently no action was forthcoming.

I submit that to my knowledge no promises with regard to deficiency payments were made, but a promise to consider the representations of the farm organizations was made, and great pains have been taken to consider fully all these proposals.

In reply to the final part of the hon. member's question, there will be an answer to this whole problem just as soon as it is possible for the Prime Minister to be back here in Ottawa. He has had other duties which have taken him afield. It will be just a matter of days before an announcement is made concerning this whole problem, and I think that announcement will clearly indicate to members of this house as well as to the people of western Canada that this government is fully aware of the problems affecting western agriculture and is quite prepared to take such steps as are necessary to assist the farming population of western Canada.

Hon. L. B. Pearson (Leader of the Opposition): Has the attention of the minister been drawn recently to a statement made by the Prime Minister in Moose Jaw on March 15, 1958, to the effect that sympathetic consideration should be given to making deficiency payments to wheat, oats and barley growers so that their returns would bear a fair relationship to the cost of production?

Mr. Churchill: My attention has been drawn to that statement. There is nobody in this country with more sympathy for the problems of the farmers than the Prime Minister of Canada.

Mr. Jack McIntosh (Swift Current-Maple Creek): Mr. Speaker, I should like to direct a question to the Minister of Trade and Commerce. I wonder if he is aware of a mimeographed letter that was sent to the residents of my constituency by the hon. member for Assiniboia in regard to deficiency payments?

Mr. Churchill: Mr. Speaker, my attention has been drawn to the contents of that mimeographed letter in which the hon. member for Assiniboia offers some criticism of me—

Some hon. Members: Order.