

power—Local Initiatives Program—Measures to accelerate approval of projects; the hon. member for St. John's East (Mr. McGrath)—Search and Rescue—Steps to ensure adequate number of planes and vessels for accidents off east coast.

Mr. Gleave: Mr. Chairman, it has taken us some time to reach this very important item under which assistance will be given to the farmers in the Peace River area. It is the first item in these estimates. In speaking this afternoon in committee, I want to say that following correspondence and telephone calls which I have received, I am very concerned about the amount of assistance that has been offered to farmers in the Peace River country, both in Alberta and in British Columbia. This Committee should be made aware of the fact that their need is very great and that it has not been met by the amounts of money that have been provided for the relief of these farmers. Possibly the first move has properly been made in providing a blanket solution. However, on examining the situation closely I find that the farmers in various parts of the Peace River region have not suffered these hardships equally. There are areas which have suffered a total loss, while in others significant amounts of the crop have been recovered.

• (1710)

In addition to what has been done, I suggest that the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Whelan) himself make a detailed on-the-spot survey of the conditions that exist in that part of the prairie region. My understanding is that he has been in Edmonton, met with ministers of the Alberta and British Columbia governments, and received reports from them. I say he should go personally to that area, talk to the farm families, and find out how those people are making out. I hope he will do this.

I hold in my hand an article from the *Globe and Mail*, a Toronto paper. It is headed, "A White Disaster for Peace River." It describes the real hardships that exist in certain parts of the Peace River country. I say that the minister should see to it that the people there receive all necessary assistance from other Canadians. This article in the *Globe and Mail* reports that farm families in the area say that what has been done to date is not adequate.

I also have a letter here from one of the Farm Union representatives in the Peace River area. He writes that there will be real hardship unless a more adequate and comprehensive job is done. I quote from his letter as follows:

In short, the farm economy here requires a substantial injection of capital if it is to remain viable. Nothing less will guarantee its continuation as a contributor to the welfare of the country. I would suggest that the government has already set this sort of precedent. It has found it advisable, or expedient, to inject great amounts of cash into any number of projects of no more importance than this—OFY programs, manpower training programs, DREE incentive grants, and not the least, great tax concessions to any number and variety of corporations, many of them foreign owned.

We have provided assistance for corporations already. When the United States proposed, and indeed imposed, restrictions against the export of certain Canadian manufactured goods to the United States, we took action not more than a year ago to provide assistance. And we did

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not make it a limited program. We made it an open-ended program so that if companies could prove the damage done to them and the amount they needed, that amount of money would be paid under the formula in the act that we passed. I, as a farmer, as a Prairie representative, voted for that legislation. I, and others on this side of the House, thought it was necessary to keep Canadians in business. We did not think that Canadian businesses should be destroyed. All I am pleading this afternoon is that we do as much for the people who suffered disaster in western Canada as we were prepared to do for corporations in eastern Canada. I do not know if the Minister of Agriculture will pay any attention to my plea. I had hoped he would be in the House this afternoon when we were discussing estimates which affect his department. Perhaps he did not receive enough notice; I do not know, but I hope he will read the reports of the speeches made by those who are talking on behalf of these farmers.

These particular farmers suffered difficulties in previous years. That is why they are in straightened circumstances. Their reserves of credit and cash were already badly depleted. I understand that in that area the Farm Credit Corporation is not pressing collections on money owed to it. I say that the minister in charge of the Canadian Wheat Board should make representations to that board not to press collections under its cash advances program, in instances where farmers, because of weather conditions, have been unable to deliver grain and will not be able to deliver grain. There is no point in harassing those people at this time because they have neither grain nor money. The old saying that you cannot get blood out of a turnip is still true. I urge that minister to consult with officials of the Wheat Board to see if some assistance can be given in that area. Of course, interest rates have been a factor in the whole equation, but not the only one.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, the Minister of Agriculture did give some undertaking at a meeting of the Miscellaneous Estimates Committee, when I asked him if the government would give consideration to providing supplies of seed grain so that farmers could put in another crop in this area. He replied:

We will be watching it very closely. If our investigations show that there may be a need to move jointly in seeds, etc., for them, we will do it. We already know the plans that we made on shipping feed in for the livestock and again there is not going to be the need that we thought there was for this unless it speeds up tremendously.

I call the attention of the House to that commitment, and hope adequate funds will be provided so that farmers can put in another crop and take it off properly.

Now, I wish to speak briefly about the Canadian Livestock Feed Board. Additional money is provided in these supplementary estimates for the transportation of feed grains. Again, I understand that this need arises in part because of bad weather conditions in eastern Canada, which resulted in less production of grain and corn than had been expected. As a result, we find it necessary to move larger amounts of feed grain into eastern regions to meet the needs of farmers there. I want to say that as far as we are concerned, we are prepared to see these amounts come before this committee, and we are prepared to support them so that farmers will be assured of the amounts of grain that they need. We are always pre-