

Agri-bond Program

farmers of Canada. These are the men who understand only too well the amount of sweat and hard work that goes into sustaining the agricultural industry.

• (1720)

Let us look for a moment, Mr. Speaker, at what might happen if we allowed our agriculture industry to go down the tube, as most assuredly we are doing today by not giving it proper support. We depend on the commodity export market, on the shipment of grain, livestock and dairy products, that great variety of items produced by our agriculture industry, to maintain Canada's balance of payments. We have seen the disastrous effect this Government's policies have had on our balance of payments. Interest rates have gone up because we are trying to attract foreign capital back into the country. At the same time, when we came to Parliament and asked for assistance for the farmers, the ones who are actually producing goods which contribute to a positive balance of payments, the Government said no. Interest rates could have remained level across the country. People could have bought homes and cars and financed them at a reasonable rate. But we did nothing to help the one segment of the economy—which contributes more than any other to the well-being of all Canadians. Think for a moment what would happen if we did not export agricultural commodities to foreign markets where they are needed. Think of what would happen to interest rates given the policies of the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources (Mr. Chrétien) which gave money to a Crown corporation to buy a foreign oil company and ship billions of dollars out of the country. We would not have seen interest rates at 19 per cent or 20 per cent; we would have seen them closer to 25 per cent and 30 per cent. That is what the agriculture industry does for every one of us apart from giving us the high standard of living and high standard of health we have in this country. Do you realize, Mr. Speaker, that when countries do not have the kind of productive agricultural base that Canada has everything starts to fall apart?

We do not have to look very far to see what can happen, Mr. Speaker. We have only to look to the Soviet Union. It has as much arable land as Canada but, because of the approach it takes, because of the lack of reward to the producer, it produces very little. It cannot produce enough for its own use. Our objective for the next ten or 20 years should be to support the agriculture industry to a point where we double exports so that we in Canada can continue with the standard of living we all enjoy today.

I am pleased to speak on this motion, Mr. Speaker. I wanted my remarks to be recorded because it is important that all Members of this House, whether they be Liberal, Conservative or NDP, recognize the serious situation which exists in our farm communities. It is absolutely impossible for Members, particularly from rural areas, to go home and interview farmers and not realize what is happening in the industry today. I have seen farmers and livestock producers in my area who have had to sell virtually everything they own and move off the land. The land is being taken out of production and the only thing that is going to save it is a system which would allow

investment by retiring farmers in an agri-bond to allow the young farmer to raise a family and produce on the farm the necessary commodities for export and domestic consumption. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, I urge this House to consider very carefully the motion presented by my colleague and allow it to pass.

Mr. Vic Althouse (Humboldt-Lake Centre): Mr. Speaker, it gives me a great deal of pleasure to participate in this debate on a motion moved by my friend from Bruce-Grey. It says:

That the Standing Committee on Agriculture be empowered to examine the establishment of an Agri-bond Program to provide the present Canadian agriculture industry and young Canadians, who are the nation's future farmers, with adequate funding at reasonable rates, and recommend methods of implementing such a program;

That such examination include the hearing and consideration of the views of interested parties and organizations;

That it be an instruction to the said Committee that it meet forthwith; and

That the Committee submit its report not later than March 31, 1984.

At the end of his opening remarks the Hon. Member moved another motion that debate on this item continue past adjournment hour. Because there were not 25 Members to oppose the motion, we will perhaps be discussing this very important issue for the next several days unless we can get some agreement to send it to committee to be dealt with in depth.

I have just been going through my records, Mr. Speaker, and I find that this matter has been raised before. I made speeches on it in 1980 and 1981. We issued news releases, and we included it in a presentation to the OFA task force on agriculture, which you will perhaps remember made a tour of the Province of Ontario to investigate the reasons behind the rapid increase in bankruptcies taking place, particularly among young beginning farmers in that province at that time. I can only say that in the intervening years the symptoms of the disease, lack of income which is followed by lack of credit in the farm community, have spread beyond Ontario and Quebec where the first indications showed up with an increased sudden spate of bankruptcies. Now virtually every province in Canada is faced with a great number of farmers going bankrupt each year. We note that farm debt is rising across the country largely because farm markets have not been adequate.

• (1730)

This is not the place to spend a great deal of time talking about the shortcomings of some of the marketing systems that we have in place. Suffice it to note that the red meat sector in particular has been having difficulty in part because it does not have, as some of the other farm products do, a national form of marketing its products and a national single-desk agency to establish prices and establish the amount that should be allowed on the market at any one time. Consequently, purchasers in the market place are taking advantage of the producers of these products and using their marketing power to reduce the price at the farm gate, because there are very few buyers in such markets.

The agri-bond was one of the possible solutions to assist the next generation to come into agriculture under such difficult