

I have the honour to be,
sir,
Your obedient servant,
André Garneau
Brigadier General
Administrative Secretary
to the Governor General

[Translation]

Mr. Speaker: It being four o'clock, the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's order paper, namely notices of motions, public bills and private bills.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' MOTIONS

[English]

AGRICULTURE

SUGGESTED STEPS TO CONTINUE FAMILY FARMS

Mr. Paul Yewchuk (Athabasca) moved:

That in the opinion of this House the government should consider the advisability of taking steps to reduce or reverse the continuing depopulation of rural areas in particular through the introduction of short and long-term measures to save the family farm.

He said: Mr. Speaker, it is almost a year since I placed this motion on the order paper. There have been certain changes affecting agriculture since that time, but the motion still applies today as it did a year ago. I have always felt that agriculture is one of our most important primary industries and is very vital to the Canadian economy. Indeed, I would go so far as to say that it is the backbone of our country's existence. It, therefore, is a direct responsibility of the federal government not only to support this industry to the maximum extent it can but to implement policies which will guarantee its continual expansion and growth.

Presently we are in the middle of a world food crisis. World food shortages and higher food prices to Canadians make it all the more important to realize that any policy other than one of expansion in agriculture is completely unacceptable. Although Canada is becoming a highly industrialized nation, we must continue to produce food because that is certainly one of the things that we can do best. Until very recently it was something we did best in a manner which provided sufficient food not only for Canadians but also for export.

The year 1969, one year after the inauguration of the present government and its policies, was the turning point in Canadian agriculture because that was the year in which for the first time in our history we actually imported more agricultural products than we exported. In other words, the policies of the present government were so filled with disincentive to produce that which we used to do best—and which we can still do best—that it became an unprofitable business to the point at which, in order to provide an adequate food supply to Canadians, we had to buy from other countries.

Family Farm

Even today we are short of commodities which we are well able to produce, but we do not see the kind of policy changes that are required in order to correct this inequity. The first example that comes to my mind is dairy production. We are not producing enough of certain dairy products; there has been a marked decline in our dairy production since the implementation of policies which are now in existence.

Over the past ten years we have seen a continuing depopulation of rural areas because of lack of incentives by way of adequate financial return to the producers. Between the years 1966-71 there was a daily loss of 44 people from the farm to urban centres in the three prairie provinces. This works out to the migration of over 16,000 people per year from the farm to the city in the three prairie provinces. It means the loss of over 4,000 farm families. The core of the problem is, without any doubt, the fact that net farm income has been continuously declining.

Because of the world food shortage in the past few months, however, gross farm income has increased significantly and for the first time in many years farmers felt that they were getting a fair return for their product. However, this feeling of satisfaction did not persist very long when immediately on the heels of increased farm income followed spiralling increased farm costs which have now surpassed the increased income.

The price of machinery continues to rise unchecked in spite of the statements made by the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Whelan) that he has implemented most of the recommendations of the royal commission on the price of farm machinery. This minister has given us assurances that farm machinery prices would not rise unreasonably, yet his assurances have been followed by spiralling costs. The price of fuel to power farm machinery has also gone up substantially. The price of fertilizer, another big item on the farmer's expense list, has nearly doubled in the past year or two.

If you recall, Mr. Speaker, nearly a year ago or, to be more exact, last February, we called for a freeze on prices, incomes, profits, etc. which would not apply to the price of agricultural products at the farm gate. If this suggestion had been implemented at that time, when farm product prices were quite good but inflation had not yet struck so fiercely as it now has, the farmer today would be in a much better economic condition. The Liberals and the NDP scoffed at our proposal. In addition they took action to cut the price of meat and the price of wheat, and the farmers' opportunity for a fair return quickly vanished.

While the government can argue that our farmers are doing as well as any other farmers in the world, that kind of argument carries no weight with me. The fact is, the policies of the present government have been extremely detrimental toward the farmer and his income. I would not complain too much if the policies were at least neutral; if they didn't improve things on the farm but also didn't make things worse. But, in fact, the policies of this government have caused the western Canadian farmer to lose millions of dollars in direct revenue. I am, of course, referring to the LIFT program which was introduced by the minister responsible for the Wheat Board, the hon. member for Saskatoon-Humboldt (Mr. Lang) and was