

The Budget—Mr. Mayer

For the rest of my time, Mr. Speaker, I want to talk a little bit about Canadian agriculture, a very important sector of the Canadian economy. I will give you some figures which will hopefully point out the validity of what I just said. If you include all the various sectors of agriculture, it accounts for one-sixth of all the economic activity in the country and 18 per cent of the work force. If you break it down further, a little over 4 per cent of Canada's population is engaged directly in farming. That gives you an idea of how efficient Canadian agriculture has become over the past number of years.

In nine of the ten provinces agriculture ranks in the top three contributors to gross provincial product. In 1982, the last year for which figures are complete and available, agricultural exports were approximately \$9.5 billion, including over \$6 billion from the sale of grain. At least 50 cents out of each dollar of Canadian farm income comes from exports. If you break out the prairie provinces, something like 60 per cent of grains produced on the Prairies are exported.

To break it down further, in Saskatchewan almost 80 per cent of the farm income is from cash crops, most of which are exported. If you understand simple figures, Mr. Speaker, that should tell you agriculture is a very important part of the economy. Yet there is hardly anything of any substance in the Budget with regard to agriculture. I have to wonder why. Is it because our present Minister of Agriculture does not understand, care or have any clout in Cabinet? The simple fact is that nothing is happening as far as agriculture in the Budget is concerned. That does not mean there are no problems in agriculture. Agriculture is facing basically the same kind of problems as far as economic activity is concerned as any other part of the economy.

● (1115)

I would like to point out another example which disturbs a lot of us. Over the past summer there was a major economic initiative as far as agriculture is concerned in Bill C-155, commonly known as the Crow Bill. Yet it was largely carried by the Department of Transport. The Department of Agriculture had very little input into what went on. I find that incredible in terms of the importance the Bill had with regard to Canadian agriculture.

I see the former Minister of Transport shaking his head. I have to disagree with him. I sat on the committee all summer. I think I missed two or three out of 66 committee meetings. The evidence presented by the Department of Agriculture was very minimal as far as I could see. I find that very sad because Bill C-155 is going to have major effects on agriculture. It was in fact an agricultural initiative. A case could be made, Mr. Speaker, that it could almost have been a Bill shepherded through the House by the Minister of Agriculture. Yet as far as we who attended the committee meetings could see, there was very little input from the Department of Agriculture. It is a sad state of affairs.

Mr. Pepin: There is a difference between the preparation of a Bill and its passage through the House and committee.

Mr. Mayer: I would like to make some points about some of the things the Government could have put in the Budget which would not have cost a lot of dollars. The Government likes to berate the Opposition, saying that we want to have increased Government programs and at the same time cut down on the deficit. That is sometimes the case. However, I would like to point out some areas in which the Government could have moved which would not have cost the Treasury very many dollars, and in some cases no dollars at all.

Before I do that, I would like to make one brief point. The Government berates the Opposition, saying that the cutting we would do would be in the area of social programming. That is not the case at all. One of the best social programs you can have in the country is simply a job. People that have jobs are not in need of a lot of social programs. From my experience with people who have been unfortunate enough not to have jobs, I believe they would much sooner have a job than rely on government for social assistance. Anything that this Government can do to create jobs in the country by implication negates the need for social programs. If we are ever given a chance to form the Government of the country, Mr. Speaker, one of our first emphases will be on jobs. One of the best ways to attack the need for social assistance in the country is to provide people with jobs.

I would like to return to what the Government could have done with regard to agriculture. I pointed out that a large portion of Canadian farm income is earned through exports. That means that if we are going to become competitive we have to have input prices very similar to the United States, which is our biggest competitor. The U.S. is our very close neighbour and ally, but it is also our competitor when it comes to world markets for agricultural products. For almost six years the border has been closed to the importation of farm chemicals. It is my understanding that there is still quite a difference in price between farm chemicals available across the line in the United States and the ones in Canada.

The Government could have considered opening the borders to give Canadian farmers access to less expensive chemicals. This cannot be done now in the spring of the year when a lot of people in the farm chemical business have laid in supplies which are more expensive than similar American products. However, there is a time of the year—I suggest the fall or the early new year—when the Government could consider opening up the border and it would not cost it anything as far as expenditures are concerned. I am told that the reason the border was closed in the first place was to allow Canadian manufacturers and suppliers to gear up production so they could compete with suppliers from other parts of the world. Surely six years is long enough. I had the opportunity to talk to some people in the farm chemical business. They agree that it would help everyone if there was an open border to farm chemicals.

● (1120)

Let me talk about farm fuel because we have heard several concerns raised about its high cost. Although it is difficult to