

Assistance to Western Farmers

crop being recovered. The year is going on, we are getting into November, and we expect winter instead of harvest conditions.

We have repeatedly asked the government to give priority to the cash advance legislation over other legislation that has been brought forward, and this has been refused. In the last few weeks we have had no opportunity to discuss this matter which has now become not only a regional problem but one that is going to affect the economy of the whole of Canada.

I respectfully suggest to Your Honour that this matter should be discussed today; because the farm credit act, even though it may come up after the post office bill is passed, does not deal with this particular situation. All it does is provide money to be lent to farmers, but it does not in any way alleviate their immediate lack of cash which we feel the government should be considering in this serious situation.

Hon. Otto E. Lang (Minister without Portfolio): Mr. Speaker, I think it is very clear that this matter raised by the hon. member for Saskatoon-Biggar is a serious one; as is so frequently the point, this is not the issue here. Had the hon. member waited I am sure that later today he would discover that the wheat board, in its usual fashion, has the matter well in hand. So far as the handling of the difficult problem of damp and tough grain is concerned the wheat board is taking steps, in its usual fashion, to see that the greatest possible favour is given to the handling of damp grain.

The situation is so serious this year that it may not be able to handle the tough grain, but so far as urgency of debate is concerned it seems to me clear that the urgent thing is for this house to get on with the announced business of the house so we can then proceed with those pieces of farm legislation to which reference has been made.

Right Hon. J. G. Diefenbaker (Prince Albert): Mr. Speaker, until the hon. gentleman opposite spoke I could fully understand the reasons for your expected decision, but the hon. gentleman transgressed the rules of the house in endeavouring to explain why the government has not acted up to now, and has now acted today through the wheat board.

If ever there was a serious situation it is this. The seriousness has been admitted by the hon. gentleman, and I appreciate that admission on his part. Anyone in this chamber who has not been in western Canada has

no idea how serious the situation is. The hon. gentleman says we should get on with the rest of the business of the house. I say there is nothing more important, more imperative and more urgent than the dangerous situation on the prairies today.

I would like to see the Prime Minister, on behalf of the government, rise and say "We want immediate action in this regard." We want immediate action because in the last two or three days the situation has seriously accelerated to a point where the economy of western Canada is in danger. I would think this is one occasion when the government would not follow the course of forgetting about western Canada, and would give the house an opportunity to discuss this situation.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. John Burton (Regina East): Mr. Speaker, may I suggest that there is urgency of debate on this question. On the facts of the matter there can be no dispute. According to the most recent reports of the Saskatchewan wheat pool, approximately 40 per cent of the crop in that province still remains to be harvested, and a good deal of the grain that has been harvested is in tough or damp condition.

As pointed out by the hon. member for Saskatoon-Biggar, a number of inquiries have been made in this house with regard to government programs to deal with the serious situation which faces the prairies. The normal answer given is that more time is required to determine the exact extent of the problem, and to see whether the farmers in fact would be able to harvest all of the crop on the prairies.

I think, as has been made clear within the past several days and as has been pointed out today, it will not be possible for many of the farmers on the prairies to harvest their crop. I confirmed this myself today in conversation with my constituents.

With reference to the remarks of the Minister without Portfolio, it seems to me there is no better opportunity than is being presented now to discuss some of the matters to which he referred. He referred to the actions of the Canadian Wheat Board. What we require is a discussion of the over-all situation. The minister referred to the necessity to get on with the legislation that is now before us. I suggest that this is only one part of the program required to deal with this situation. In fact there are many different programs which are required to deal with the problems facing the prairies.