

*Supply—Mr. Winkler*

minister's words as reported in *Hansard* at page 2821 stand out and demonstrate what I am asking for the people of the agricultural constituency I have the honour to represent. At that time he had this to say on behalf of his own constituents with regard to a very critical situation that had developed at that time, and was being dealt with in this house. I refer to the drought situation that existed in the Ottawa valley:

I think this is a desperate and dark hour in the lives of these people, most of whom have lived in this area of eastern Ontario for many generations. I do not think these are people who come running to government every time something gets a little tough. I do not think they come to us on their knees, and they never will, because these are proud people. But I do suggest that if we have any function here whatsoever—

I think this is important, Mr. Speaker:

But I do suggest that if we have any function here whatsoever it surely is to see to it that we use every measure and every available facet of governmental action that is available to us in order to alleviate this desperate situation of the farmers of eastern Ontario.

Those were very honourable words, Mr. Speaker, because I know the seriousness of the situation with which he was dealing at that time. One of his suggestions was this:

There should be a moratorium with respect to principal and interest on mortgages pending the alleviation of drought conditions.

He went on to say later on:

I am sure that in conjunction with the chartered banks we can make some arrangement whereby farmers will not be squeezed out of existence because this year they will not be able to pay interest on bank loans or make repayments of principal.

I could go on at great length quoting the minister, but that is not necessary because I think this gives the house the basis and foundation for what I am now going to say. I wrote to the minister shortly after he took office in connection with the drastic situation that existed in western Ontario due to the inability of farmers to harvest their crops, through no fault of their own but because of wet and early winter conditions.

This critical situation exists in the counties of Bruce, Grey, Dufferin, Simcoe, Wellington and, I suggest, a host of others. I believe this situation exists in Huron as well. It is equally as disastrous as the drought situation that existed in the Ottawa valley last spring with which the minister's own constituents were concerned. The only reply that I received—and it may be constitutionally, the reply that

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any minister would send—with that he could not interfere because he thought it was a totally provincial matter.

This may be so, Mr. Speaker, but at that particular time he was asking the minister of the day to take the leadership in the problem that existed in his own constituency—and this is what I ask the minister to consider doing tonight, tomorrow or the next day. These farmers in western Ontario took their cattle to sales, the same as the farmers did early in the spring of last year, and offered them for sale at 11, 12 or 14 cents a pound in order to get rid of them, because they had no feed for them.

The minister of agriculture of that day went to bat for the constituents of the present minister. He saw to it that certain feed situations were brought about which meant that these farmers could stay in business and could weather the storm. The present minister saw to it that his own thinking was put into action by the minister of that day. That is all I am asking him to do today, namely take the leadership in this situation so that the farmers of the counties I have mentioned can weather the winter and start afresh next spring without taking the weight of government debt, bank debt, or having the shortage of feed create the necessity for them to get rid of their cattle through the winter months.

If the minister does not think this is a serious matter—and I hope he will read these words tomorrow in *Hansard*—I would ask him only to re-read the brief that was forwarded to him by quite a large assembly of farmers' representatives of all these counties, which meeting many members attended during the course of the winter months. As a matter of fact, Mr. Speaker, I recall the meeting very well, and regrettably perhaps—and I say this advisedly—no Liberal member of the federal government was able to attend. However, there were two from the provincial authority. Although I received a great promise of co-operation in effort, up to today I have received none.

In other words, I assume that the provincial representatives who attended that meeting were not interested in the well-being of those farmers. Though I have petitioned the minister on more than one occasion since then to come to the rescue and assistance of the farmers to whom I have referred, to this day the minister has not seen fit to offer suggestion, help or any kind of moratorium