

*Government Orders*

the law said it had to provide money but there was no money in the budget. It was the government that caught itself in this net. It did not seem to realize what it had done for a long time because it was not until June 26 that any mention was made at all of the situation that now faces farmers.

That bill was only introduced on June 26 and was not discussed in any way while the House was still sitting. It obviously was not urgent then. When we came back, I believe on September 26, the government realized it had botched the whole writing of that bill so badly that it could not stand scrutiny and would not even work, could not even be made operational. So the government withdrew the bill. The next day it came back with the bill that we see before us today.

If you look at this, there were 152 days between when the government broke the law by not providing money for a statutory program and the time when the government introduced the legislation that was supposed to correct this oversight. There have been eight days since then, about eight hours of which have actually been spent by the opposition debating this bill, and the government has the nerve to accuse us of dragging our heels and keeping money out of the hands of farmers when, first of all, it broke the statute and, second, it did not introduce a proper bill for 152 days.

That is just the kind of thing that the farmers of this country are not finding acceptable. That is making farmers coast to coast, including a lot of Conservative farmers, very angry with this government. I think this government is starting to feel the heat, and that is why the minister says that he feels sad.

I would in fact like to go so far as to have him discuss this with my colleagues. One way that we could get money very quickly to farmers, if we do not want to go through the whole process of debating this bill some more, having it go to committee, putting it through third reading and report stage, proclaiming it, then gearing up the bureaucracy it will take to administer this bill, is for the government to allow this amendment to pass.

• (1240)

Otherwise, even at best we are probably looking to the new year. If it is like the drought payment it could well take until March or April to get all the mechanisms in

place, given the record of this government. We could get money flowing tomorrow if the government would allow this amendment to pass. I am sure that my colleagues on this side of the House would immediately approve the \$27 million and the Supplementary Estimate in the same way we did for the drought program in June, to get this money flowing to farmers. I am sure I have the support of members on this side of the House for that kind of an initiative. I ask the minister to very seriously consider that.

The minister also made considerable effort to place this bill in the context of the government's over-all fiscal policy, the need to cope with the deficit by making the farmers assume part of the deficit reduction in this country. But again it was a totally contradictory approach that the minister took. First of all, he brags on the one hand that in the last year the government has spent \$3 billion on the farm sector of which he is very proud, but then on the other hand he said this \$27 million, which is a very key element right now for a lot of farmers' cash flow and in the operation of marketing organizations from coast to coast, absolutely has to be cut and cut right now. It just does not make any kind of sense at all.

The other argument that the minister made is that this deficit reduction has to take place because what is really killing farmers is high interest rates. That was one time when I in fact agreed with the minister. I applauded the minister for his insight in saying that, yes, high interest rates are killing farmers.

In fact they are, but it seemed very ironic coming from a minister who stands up in full support of the Governor of the Bank of Canada when he persists, in the face of virtually unanimous opinion from the forecasting and economic analysis community, the bankers and everybody, many of the government's friends, in keeping interest rates much higher in this country than they need be. In fact, the stubborn refusal to even consider changes to the interest rate policy by the Minister of Finance and the Governor of the Bank of Canada is what is killing the economy in all sectors, not just agriculture.

I cannot see how the minister can say that to lower interest rates we have to cut this \$27 million when it is his own government's policy that is causing the high interest rates in this country. Furthermore, if he is that worried about high interest rates, why is he out there