

Government Orders

the rate of inflation. In the period from 1984-85 to the present, transfers to the province of Saskatchewan have grown 89 per cent. That equates to an average annual growth rate of 8.3 per cent, which I would suggest, if the member goes back and looks at the statistics, is probably about twice the rate of inflation over that same period of time. The hon. member says we have not kept pace with the rate of inflation. Was he suggesting that we were transferring less than the rate of inflation or more than the rate of inflation? The facts show that we have transferred to the province of Saskatchewan, transfers that were almost double the rate of inflation. Is that what he was referring to? Is he not familiar with the exact numbers? In 1984 it was \$727 million; in 1992-93 it is proposed to be \$1.374 billion, 89 per cent more. I would like your comments on that.

Mr. Fisher: Mr. Speaker, as I said, there are times when untoward circumstances happen in the regions. The most untoward circumstance that happened to the province of Saskatchewan was that it elected a PC government in 1982.

Prior to 1982 the province of Saskatchewan was very nearly a have province, which was quite an accomplishment for that region of the country. Over the years when the CCF first came in and then in 1971 when the Allan Blakeney government came in, the province prospered and the transfer payments going to the province really did decline.

As I said, it is nothing to brag about that we transfer all this money to our province. We should keep in mind that a lot of this money has come to the federal government from the province anyway. The province of Ontario supplies the federal government with 45 per cent of its tax money. A lot of the money belongs to the people anyway.

I know there has been a lot of money going to agriculture in Saskatchewan but the federal government, whether it is the final payment from the Wheat Board or payment under grain stabilization or whatever, fails to take into account that there is a goodly portion of that money that belongs to the people who have paid for insurance programs and so on. It really is very galling that the federal government takes so much credit for it.

While we are speaking of agriculture and support, I suppose we could also talk in terms of lack of support. It is amazing that the last budget had no reference at all to agriculture. That is rather strange because agriculture is certainly in the forefront of the minds of a good many Canadians, not just farmers right now. Of course we have the situation where the marketing boards are in so much danger and talks are going on concerning the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade.

I was talking to a member of the National Farmers' Union the other day and he told me how in the early days of this present round of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, this government actually had committed Canada to a tariffication of those agricultural products and the flim-flam we have seen lately and the tremendous support it ostensibly has for marketing boards is just that, flim-flam.

Mr. Francis G. LeBlanc (Cape Breton Highlands—Canso): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to say a few words on this legislation which is an act to amend the Federal-Provincial Fiscal Arrangements Act and Federal Post-Secondary Education and Health Contributions Act and to really speak to the legislation this bill is designed to amend.

The equalization payment system and the federal-provincial transfer payment system that is described in this legislation is really, as the minister in introducing the legislation remarked earlier today, the cornerstone of the system of fiscal federalism in Canada and a very key element of what it means fiscally to be a Canadian.

• (1810)

The equalization payments system which has been developed over the last 30 odd years under both Liberal and Conservative governments is really an important aspect of what ties this country together. It allows those people living in provinces and in regions which do not have the fiscal capacity of those living in wealthier regions to be able to have the same level of public services as other provinces and regions that have a larger income base. They may have this base through natural resource endowments or sources of income. In that way they allow Canadians wherever they live to be able to have the same level of services without having to pay extraordinary levels of provincial and federal taxes.