

Supplementary Estimates

In true Liberal fashion the minister has dubbed and clubbed his hasty wheat acreage reduction plan as Operation Lift. It would be more appropriate, I think, to use the initials of the plan itself, WARP or operation WARP. My dictionary gives the following definition of warp: to change from straight or right or natural state; to make crooked or perverted. That is a pretty good definition of what this plan will do to Prairie farming. The minister laboured "Lang," or long, and concluded that we would have less wheat in 1970 if we did not grow any wheat in 1970. This was his conclusion after all that labour.

The Liberals have been somewhat less than honest in their promotion of operation WARP. They have implied that it will provide a large income supplement to grain growers. In the minister's words, "If farmers get behind this program... the cash position of grain producers and the whole Prairie economy will be substantially improved this fall". I submit that is nonsense. The \$6 per acre provided for summerfallow will mostly, if not entirely, be taken up in the cost of additional summerfallow. To suggest this is some kind of cash injection or additional cash in the farmers' pockets is dishonest and misrepresenting what the money will actually have to be used for. It is not—I repeat not—a cash injection of any kind in respect of farm income.

● (5:40 p.m.)

I for one, and the many farmers who have written to me—some of whom have even telephoned and spoken by the hundreds to my colleague the hon. member for Saskatoon-Biggar in the past several days—resent the inference by any government spokesman and any headline writers of the press that by any means this is an injection of cash into the farmers' pockets, because it is not. Let us put this program in its proper place. All it is is a small carrot and a large club. The small carrot is the \$6 an acre payment for converting wheat acreage to summerfallow acreage. A payment of \$6 an acre to support the cost of summerfallowing is a mighty small carrot. But the club, or the gun at the head of the farmer, is the new quota system. The farmer who wishes to move a large amount of grain next year must take acreage out of production and must not use that acreage for any crop other than forage.

Whatever misgivings the farmer may have, that the new quota system will persuade him, because he has two choices: it will

[Mr. Benjamin.]

either be compulsory, or he has to do it. This new program, operation WARP, is designed to do one thing and one thing only. It is designed to drastically cut wheat production in 1970 without substantially increasing other grain or oilseed crops. On thing it certainly does not do: it does not in any sense relieve the serious cash shortage which has paralyzed the vast majority of grain farmers in Saskatchewan.

Payments under this plan will barely meet costs in the most favourable areas. Certainly, in many areas it will fail to even cover the farmers' costs. Perhaps this program would be tolerable if it were part of a comprehensive attack on the short-term farm crisis and longer term adjustments. But as a minimum it must be accompanied by substantial supplementary payments to farmers related not to next year's production but to this year's lack of income.

Every major farm organization has called for a program of supplementary payments to Prairie grain producers. They have pleaded for this repeatedly over the past several years. It was a central point in the farm program put forward by the members of the official opposition and of my party repeatedly in this House. Possibly in many respects this was as a result of the demand by farm organizations, but in other respects we were putting forward programs which were part of the policies of our respective parties.

We proposed that the federal government provide not less than \$200 million to support payments across the three Prairie provinces. Not only did the minister and the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) turn a deaf ear to this proposal, but even the Liberal Premier of Saskatchewan went to the Federal-Provincial Conference in February and made not one demand for supplementary cash payments to meet Saskatchewan's farm crisis. To this day he has failed the farm organizations, the farmers and the small town merchants. His silence and the silence of many other Liberals on this question demonstrates better than anything else the true kinship that exists along the Thatcher-Trudeau axis.

We need, first of all, production guides which recognize the value of what farmers can grow as a national trading asset of benefit to all Canada. We need production guides which recognize long-term world food needs. We need production guides which recognize the contribution which satisfying rural life and employment can make to the economic and social structure of Canada. We need,