

Agriculture

last year or this year. It is not the exact nature of the initial price.

Mr. Ken Hurlburt (Lethbridge): Mr. Speaker, as far as the cost of living is concerned, for the consumer the year 1973 has been a disaster. For the farmer, up to this point, it has been one of the best years on record. For the cattleman, it has gone from the sublime to the ridiculous. If hon. members go back five years or even ten years, the positions that I have just outlined will be found to have been exactly the opposite. It is a case of either the farmer and cattleman having a hard time, or the consumer. I would suggest that with a little help and common sense from the federal government—something that is currently sadly lacking—we could have a situation where the farmer and the consumer are working hand in hand for a better life.

● (1730)

I believe that with sensible and imaginative policies, and with an eye on the long term rather than on the short term, we could have a situation where the farmer and cattleman have a secure market, a secure price for their product, and consumers are not stampeded by scare tactics into paying high prices for what goes on to their supper tables. For example, according to news reports of recent months, Canadians from coast to coast were buying deep freezers costing \$200 to \$400 and then stocking up the freezers with beef bought when its price was sky-high. These people have been cheated; they have been cheated by the federal Liberal government's misinformation.

There have been news reports about the beef shortage scare and nightmare prices for beef, reports for which in one instance I do not blame the news media. As a result, worried consumers spent hundreds of dollars buying freezers which they really did not need. Panic buying of beef drove up the price unnecessarily. This is why I am sorry for the consumer. But for the Liberal government's pressing the panic button, the consumer would never have stockpiled expensive beef in expensive freezers. However, Ottawa lost its nerve. It did not trust the Canadian producer to do his job and forgot about the basic law of supply and demand. In the result, money that the consumer could have spent on food was spent on buying a freezer and high-cost beef. The money spent on a freezer would have bought a lot of food at a time when panic buying had not inflated the price—but it is too late now.

The Liberal government which we currently have in Ottawa panicked; it reacted to a temporary situation with hit-and-miss tactics. But that is not unusual. You will remember, Mr. Speaker, that in 1970 the Minister of Justice in charge of the Canadian Wheat Board (Mr. Lang) promoted LIFT, in the Lower Inventory for Tomorrow program. This was his brainchild. Under this program the federal government actually paid the Canadian wheat farmers not to grow grain. Look at the situation today. Ottawa is begging western Canadian farmers to grow as much grain as possible; in fact, it is even scolding our farmers for growing too little. A strange situation, but one that is easy to understand. In looking at the short term, one forgets that situations can change. The Liberals look at the short term, but the Progressive Conservatives look at the long term. I ask hon. members opposite to keep that in mind.

[Mr. Lang.]

I suggest that it would be sound business to have 500 million bushels of grain in storage at all times, with the farmer being paid his storage charges. We could use an extra 500 million bushels of grain right now for export and for the feeding industry, as the minister himself knows. We do not have those extra bushels, and the Minister of Justice also knows why.

Under the Liberal government we live from day to day, from crisis to crisis, and react to situations rather than prepare for them. No wonder the consumer, the farmer and the cattleman are confused. And, I add, no wonder the minister is the only Liberal member of parliament from Saskatchewan. As my good friend the hon. member for Crowfoot (Mr. Horner), once remarked, the minister won his seat at the expense of every other Liberal candidate in Saskatchewan—hardly a commendable performance. However, it is one that the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau), with his strange sense of humour, might enjoy. After all, as hon. members may remember, it was the Prime Minister who less than a handful of years ago went to Saskatoon to meet the prairie farmers, and when they asked him for help in selling their wheat at a fair price he replied, "You grew it; you sell it. Why should I sell your wheat?" Perhaps after his disastrous election showing in the west just one year ago, which resulted in the Liberals obtaining seven out of 68 seats, the Prime Minister now feels differently.

However, I suggest that as far as the consumers, grain farmers and cattlemen are concerned, the change of heart, if indeed it has come about, has come too late. As far as the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Whelan) is concerned, I guess he does have some good points. He knows, at least to some extent, what farming is all about. But he seems to have taken the advice of the non-oriented agricultural advisers and self-styled experts who inhabit Parliament Hill and the Department of Agriculture's vast complexes; he talks about controlled production, supply management and marketing boards. He talks of controlled production when half of the world is crying out for more food, when the world's population is growing by leaps and bounds and hungry mouths are increasing by thousands every day. Surely, rather than talking of controlled production and supply management we should be talking about incentives to the farmer and cattleman to produce more food. That seems logical to me. If there is a need, then let us fill that need. At the same time, let the Canadian producers make a decent living.

In recent weeks a stream of news releases from the Canadian International Development Agency have come across my desk. They tell of millions of millions of dollars—Canadian taxpayers' dollars, by the way—being given to country after country. Some of this money is given in outright grants, some in the form of interest-free loans repayable over 30 or 40 years. It is a pity that young Canadians trying to borrow money to buy a house could not get such generous help from their own government. Surely, instead of giving this money away we could, in some cases at least, give food instead. Let us buy the produce of Canadian farmers at a fair price and ship it to these countries in Canadian carriers.

We would achieve a number of objectives in this way. We would feed the hungry of the world. We would encour-