

Adjournment Debate

member, Mr. Roberts, that these two gentlemen have been in consultation with the company, the union, the provincial government and the Department of Fisheries.

The hon. member opposite would no doubt agree, and I say this sincerely, that when a very large company with that kind of investment, with a web and network of processing plants around Newfoundland, announces out of the blue, without prior consultation with governments, or with anyone else, for that matter, that it plans to close down a fish plant, certainly we cannot be blamed. On the other hand, given the free enterprise system within which we live, the one that this party supports, we cannot expect, without consulting with all involved parties, to simply dictate a solution to the kind of drastic measure which was announced. All parties are very much involved in the process of consultation, with a view to doing everything possible, within reason. The key words are "responsibility" and "accountability" for taxpayers' dollars. We will ensure, within reason, that this plant and others in Newfoundland and elsewhere in Atlantic Canada are able to operate to full capacity in the year ahead.

Dr. Michael Kirby has been appointed to undertake a full review of the measures critical to ensuring the long-term viability of the fisheries. To this end he is consulting with all sectors of the industry; with the company, the union, fishermen, processors, traders and provincial governments. He will be presenting his recommendations some time in the early summer.

The hon. member across the way noted that the minister of fisheries for the province of Newfoundland asked that the question of St. Anthony be referred to the agenda of the task force. Notwithstanding the work of the task force, I assure the hon. member that the Government of Canada, through its Department of Fisheries and its minister, continues to be actively and intensively involved in the problems of the Atlantic fishery and that we seek solutions. We do not pretend for a second that these problems have not resulted in a poor market approach, or poor marketing generally. We have not been competitive. We have seen the example of companies undercutting each other in the market. The kinds of problems that have evolved from that kind of situation and others cannot be solved overnight. We recognize that this is very serious and we have a sober responsibility toward it. We intend to approach it from that point of view. We appreciate whatever advice and recommendations that come from members opposite. We only ask that the advice be given in good faith. If it is given in that way, I can assure the hon. member it will be received and considered in good faith.

● (2210)

AGRICULTURE—COST OF FUEL USED IN PRODUCTION OF FOOD

Mr. Gordon Taylor (Bow River): Mr. Speaker, why is the federal Liberal government considered anti-farmer and anti-agriculture? The glib answer of the minister the other day illustrates some of the reasons why this is so. Interest costs to farmers since 1956 have increased about fivefold, but farmers' income have increased by only 10 per cent. High interest rates,

the cost of machinery, the cost of help, increased costs of transportation and the cost of fuel are among the factors that worry farmers.

The federal government must certainly take the responsibility for high interest rates. The interest rate for Farm Credit Corporation loans was raised to 16.75 per cent by the federal government—these are loans, not grants. The Alberta government has been much more agricultural-minded. The agriculture development corporation of Alberta lends money at 12 per cent to farmers, 15 per cent to agricultural processors and I believe 6 per cent to young beginning farmers.

Machinery costs are another factor. These machinery costs were partially offset by the capital cost allowance, but the recent budget of November 12 even sliced this to one half for the year of purchase. A combine is used in the fall of the year and cutting the capital cost allowance is simply putting another financial burden, another unexpected expense on farmers. It is not reasonable or sensible to cut the allowance by one half or only for the three or four months during harvest. This is another increased cost on the production of food which farmers will have to pay. Farmers cannot pass this on, they have to absorb it.

Farm help is almost impossible to get. The employment branch of the federal government insists that there is help available among Canada's unemployed, but try to find it. Some applicants last one day, some a week. Many do not know a combine from a binder, let alone know how to drive either one. Some people want to be paid to do one thing all day and quit when they are required to do the multiple chores that have to be done. But will the government let farmers bring young farmers from Denmark, Norway, Sweden or Germany, those men and women who proved their worth through the international exchange program? No, it will not. The employment branch people say there are Canadians who can do the job. But when you ask people at the employment branch where these people are, they shrug their shoulders. This is the situation in spite of the fact that labour costs on farms have increased by probably 100 per cent during the last five years.

What about the federal government's claim that it is improving transportation for the farmers? There are boxcars lined up at the coast waiting to be unloaded and there are no boats available. The barley producers are unable to get producer cars on the prairies. The prairie farmers are paying demurrage because ships are waiting in lineups. I believe some \$18 million last year was taken out of the pockets of the prairie producers via demurrage charges.

What about the abandonment program of the Department of Transport? On the average there are rail lines being abandoned which carry a half a million bushels of grain a year. The CPR, with concurrence from the Canadian Transport Commission, is refusing to give enough time to properly clean out the elevators. Every line abandoned means increased costs of hauling grain by truck to elevators farther away. But the Government of Canada and the CTC pay no attention to the