

Government Orders

The echo that I heard from the prairies when I visited with a number of producers there last week was: "We are not talking about the last four years. We know it has been the worst time in Canadian history in agriculture. What we want to know is whether the government is going to come forward with a special program of financial assistance to help farmers this spring so that we can put in a crop." I do not know how more graphic you can have it.

The minister of agriculture for Saskatchewan and the premier of the province went on province-wide television two weeks ago tonight and pleaded with the federal government to provide assistance. If that is not a dramatic move, I do not know what could be more dramatic.

A week and a half ago when I was in Saskatchewan I was reading a copy of *The Leader Post* of Regina, the March 7 issue. It pointed out graphically the problem facing rural Canada in Saskatchewan. It pointed out that the number of bankruptcies in farm and farm service operations in Saskatchewan in January of this year totalled 16. That is equal to the total number of farm and farm service bankruptcies in the province of Saskatchewan in 1980. In fact in 1989 there were 152. In 1988 there were 115. In 1987 there were 85, and so it progresses on down.

The Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Agriculture like to tell about how terrible things were when the Liberals were in office. Clearly, if you look at the number of bankruptcies last year you will see that there were 152. In January of this year we started off with 16 totalling losses of \$3 million.

The article went on to point out that the second largest group in Saskatchewan was the retail trade industries where 11 businesses went into bankruptcy involving \$1.6 million worth of liabilities.

I would be willing to bet any amount of money that every one of those retail service industries went bankrupt because of the serious problem in cash flow in farms. That is what we are talking about here as we debate Bill C-48. We are talking about crop insurance.

We want to see the government make a commitment now with regard to cash injections. The leader of the Liberal party in Saskatchewan, Lynda Haverstock, has recommended that it be \$20 per acre for seeded acres

and that it be something less for summer fallow. The premier is calling for roughly \$10 per acre in Saskatchewan and a further injection throughout the year.

• (1300)

We do not need to get into the details. We just need the government to make this announcement today. This report from *The Leader Post* about the number of bankruptcies calls attention to the very serious problem facing the industry and the need for a cash injection and financial support in order to put in this year's crop.

Mr. Funk: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for pointing out those very graphic statistics. As the hon. member knows, for every business that goes bankrupt, there are probably 10 entrepreneurs who walk away from an intolerable situation or walk away from their debts. Bankruptcy comes at the end of a long legal process that a lot of people do not bother going through. You can factor that by at least one to ten.

The hon. member's remarks also reminded me of what the Prime Minister said during the election campaign. In Dundurn, Saskatchewan, on October 7, 1988, the Prime Minister said that "the government was not going to allow a single farmer, not one farmer, to hang out to dry simply because the Americans and the Europeans have this subsidy war going on. Until the matter is brought to a halt, the Canadian government has a responsibility to step in and defend the interests of the Canadian farmer."

"Not one farmer to hang out to dry", he said. Already in the month of January, the member alluded to 16 farmers that got hung out to dry. The member talks about the need for this program. The government is shifting more and more to *ad hoc* programs and this continual crisis kind of management in agriculture. As the member for Saskatoon—Humboldt pointed out, over the last two years while the government has bragged about the amount of money it has put in special grains programs and so on, it has also cut \$1,077 million in ongoing farm programs that farmers could count on from year to year. Those were the contributions they now have to make through Western Grain Stabilization, fuel tax rebates, increases in crop insurance, which we are talking about, branchline rehabilitations and so on. We are into a crisis management mould.