

Government Orders

Government refused to do it, but Mr. Diefenbaker did. People of all political stripes and all the farm organizations applauded them then and have done so ever since.

Why you would want to pick on this small item in all of the government's operations at the expense of agriculture producers escapes me completely. I have yet to hear any good, sound reason from anybody in this House as to the necessity for doing this, or some reason for doing it, any kind of a reason. If somebody over there can come up with a reason why this needs to be done, I would like to hear it. In fact, will somebody over there get up and make a comment so that I can answer. I invite members opposite to ask me a question.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): There are no questions or comments.

Mr. Benjamin: Why not? We are still on second reading.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): There are no questions and comments. We are now under a new set of rules. I will allow the hon. member another two or three minutes, if he would like.

Mr. Benjamin: Give me another 10 minutes. Can I have unanimous consent to continue my remarks?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): Is there unanimous consent?

Some Hon. Members: No.

Mr. George Proud (Hillsborough): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to speak to this bill. I am very disappointed that this government has again taken this jackboot approach to closure. It is a terrible day for the farmers of this country. This government has invoked closure more times than we have had legislation before this House. It is time that the government went back to the farming community, consulted with them and used the legislation that is now in place to make available to them the moneys that they so desperately need at this time of the year.

The original advance payment program, which this bill now wants to change, was designed with the basic goal of establishing an orderly market system for Canadian farm products, one which ensured that supply met demand and that prices remained relatively stable. This program was meeting that goal satisfactorily.

Farmers require a substantial input at the beginning of the season, and so at harvest time they are eager to pay off the debts arising from this input. However, if they dump their entire crop onto the market at this time, several negative things happen. A flooded market means low prices for producers, an over-stressed processing and transportation system and a produce shortage would accompany high prices for consumers in the spring. That is the result of the financial pressure on producers to sell their entire crop at harvest time.

Since the advance payments program has been implemented, Canada has enjoyed an orderly marketing system which is the envy of many countries. The basic factor in this success has been the interest free loans advanced to producers through their producer organizations and guaranteed by the federal government at harvest time.

With Bill C-36, the government is eliminating the interest free component of the loan program. In doing so, it will cripple the already vulnerable family farm in Canada. The Minister of Agriculture has tried to soften the blow by telling farmers that by losing the interest free loans they will be doing their share to overcome Canada's deficit. Well, when the banks foreclose on their farms and their families lose their livelihood, I am sure that the farmers will rest easy knowing that they are helping to cut the government's deficit.

The issue of cost effectiveness has been explored by my colleagues on this side of the House, but I believe that its importance cannot be over-emphasized. Just how much will the government save by making the farmers pay interest on their loans through this program? The minister says that the amendments to this program will save the government approximately \$20 million in this fiscal year. Dozens of farm organizations from Atlantic potato producers to Ontario corn producers to western grain producers have told this government that without the interest free component of the program, the program will be too expensive for many producers. These same organizations have told the government again and again that the advantages of this program far outweigh the costs.

The government will find out too late that there is a cost in destroying the interest free program, a cost collected not only in dollars, but in a much more