

so-called Canadian package. The hon. member should either be for these rights, he should stand up here and say, "I am for them", or he should be against them. He should not come into this House and say, "I want property rights and I will let the Hon. Sterling Lyon decide if we are to have them, or I will let the Hon. Brian Peckford decide if we are to have them."

● (2220)

That is the position, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member must either be for them or against them. Within the next month he should decide whether history will record that the Conservative Party of Canada stood for rights or whether it stood for nothing in 1981.

DROUGHT ASSISTANCE—REQUEST FOR EXTENSION OF BOUNDARIES

Mr. Doug Anguish (The Battlefords-Meadow Lake): Mr. Speaker, four months ago I addressed a question to the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Ostiguy) about the problems we have experienced with the herd maintenance program. At that time about 20 farmers in the Pierceland area of my constituency contacted me because they were outside the drought area. The program has changed somewhat since that time. They have now been considered. The government listened to our plea that they be included because they were affected by the drought just as much as some of the people within the area. We have now been assured they will be considered under the appeal process that was set up and that they will receive some funding.

The question I put to the parliamentary secretary tonight may not fit the answer he has prepared. I would like him to give the matter some thought before answering my questions about the herd maintenance program. If he does not feel comfortable answering this evening I hope he will respond at a later date, possibly by telephone or by letter.

Now that these people have been considered to come within the appeal process, it will still be a very long time before they actually receive any funding. Some other people who did come under the herd maintenance program were rejected for other reasons.

Last week in Regina I met with members of the appeal board. They are livestock producers so they can appreciate the problems farmers are having and they are trying to clear up the mess the government has got us into. A drought committee of some kind studied this problem for almost five years, I understand, in case difficulties ever arose. They have risen now and the program has proved to be totally inadequate.

The appeal board indicated to me that 35,000 appeal application forms had been sent out. Of these, 30,000 people replied. These were grouped into four categories. The first category comprised those who had been turned down because of lack of precipitation; the second were those who had been turned down because of low crop yield; the third, which concerned the greatest number of my constituents, were those

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who were adjacent to the drought area, and the fourth were the individual special cases that were being reviewed.

Because of the volume of applications received, the herd maintenance appeal board will not be able to deal with all of them until nearly the end of April. It is rather strange that, as part of the program, the producer is required to hold 70 per cent of the breeding herd until March 1, 1981. Some farmers and ranchers will not know if they qualify for the funding even after they have kept the herd all winter. I think this is unfair to producers who in many regions have had to buy feed because of poor precipitation or yield. They should not have to suffer this hardship.

For this year we have been assured that at some point those producers will get compensation if they qualify under the appeal process of the herd maintenance program. Will this drought committee function between now and next year? We may be facing another drought in western Canada because of lack of moisture and precipitation this year. I know that in many parts of my constituency the snow has now almost gone. Unless there are some heavy snowfalls between now and the spring, and if there is a lack of moisture subsequent to that when the rains start in the spring, western Canada will have a serious problem in its agricultural sector next year.

● (2225)

Does the government intend to carry on with this committee? If the government has learned anything, what will it do differently about a program in the future in place of this present disastrous program? I do not want to condemn the government for what has happened. I hope, however, that the government has learned some kind of a lesson. Hopefully we will not have to face a drought next year but the next time there is a drought in any part of Canada I trust that a program will be in place to ensure the situation is taken care of.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marcel Ostiguy (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Agriculture): Mr. Speaker, I would like to answer briefly my colleague opposite, the member for The Battlefords-Meadow Lake (Mr. Anguish), who inquired about the eligibility of those 20 farmers under the herd maintenance program and I should like to point out to him that the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Whelan), during a short visit in the west last week, stopped at his Regina office where all the cases are being reviewed. It is understood that this is being done according to specific criteria.

I would like to say to the hon. member that the program is designed to provide livestock producers who had to buy feed for their herd with the necessary funding. We now understand each other. Although the hay crops were not generally good in Saskatchewan the farmers in areas who had more than 60 per cent of precipitation or whose grain crops were higher than 80 per cent of the regular production usually are eligible for the cattle feed program.