

Adjournment Debate

agricultural situation that would suggest directions in policy. Those task forces have been meeting. There have been reports that have been filed, and the minister had promised that legislation would be in place for the 1991-1992 crop year. As of today, however, there has not been a bill presented or placed before this House. There are all sorts of housekeeping bills that have been coming before the House. This very important legislation, which requires strong debate and an in-depth view, has not been presented before this House.

• (1900)

The government has in the past bragged that it has spent billions and billions on agriculture, and that is true. Those billions that it has spent over the last few years have not been an investment that has been in the best interest of farmers. This money has not been in the best interest of urban dwellers and of taxpayers. We still have, despite the money that has been put into agriculture, people who are leaving the farm every year. Bankruptcies have increased considerably. We have a problem in rural Canada. In Saskatchewan, in 1985, when the government first promised to introduce legislation, we had over 65,000 farmers. We are now below 60,000. We are losing over 1,000 farmers a year in Saskatchewan alone.

The problem is serious and the situation is desperate. Throughout rural Canada, communities are suffering, jobs are being lost and businesses are closing because the agricultural economic base is disappearing. For a long time communities have been shrinking. Now they are starting to collapse. Since World War II, successive Liberal and Conservative federal governments have failed to pay attention to this most important issue, an issue which affects the largest portion of this country. It is the future and welfare of rural Canadians.

The question I am asking is very simple and straightforward. When is this government going to introduce legislation to deal with the agricultural crisis in this country? It has promised legislation but it has not introduced it. In western Canada, we have had one of the best crops in decades. Some farmers tell me it is the best crop they have ever had. They have grain on the ground but they cannot sell it. The prices are extremely low if they do sell it.

The government has promised legislation. When bills are introduced in this House, it is going to require that they be analysed and debated. I hope the government is not planning to introduce legislation next spring and then tell the opposition to pass it right away. That would certainly be unfair. That happened with the cash advance payments. It was introduced in September and the government said it was the New Democrats who were holding up the legislation and if this bill could pass, farmers could get payment. That is extremely unfair and undemocratic. This issue is too important for that sort of attitude.

I ask the government this: When will we be receiving some legislation in front of this House and what will be the objectives of this legislation? Is it to help farming families survive? Is it to help agri-business? Is it to help the Cargills of this world? When will we get legislation and what will be the objective of this legislation when we get it?

Mr. Murray Cardiff (Parliamentary Secretary to Deputy Prime Minister, President of the Privy Council and Minister of Agriculture): Mr. Speaker, it is certainly true that the farmers are faced with an ironic situation because of the near record crop that has been produced in all parts of Canada. Prices have plunged as world supplies have been there, distorting the export subsidy and distorting our prices very much.

There is one thing I have to say. When farmers called on this government to help, the government was there to help them. It did answer that call.

Earlier this year, on October 13, the Minister of Agriculture announced a one year program of the reintroduction of the interest free cash advances on undelivered grain. That is going to help many producers.

That provides \$50,000 interest free, plus, if they require further dollars than that and qualify for it, they are able to get additional dollars to help their cash flow.

Even that amount is going to greatly enhance the cash flow of many of our farmers. It is going to provide for this program upwards of \$1.4 billion to be advanced interest free, which is a total cost of about \$95 million. Of course, we all know how those programs are going to be administered through the various groups, whether they be in western Canada or in other parts of the provinces