

Agricultural Policies

by the two levels of government for the benefit of the agricultural class, more especially as subsidies of all kinds are greater than the annual per capita income of farmers.

The plain truth is that after having encouraged a great number of people to take up farming, agricultural workers are less and less needed.

Such is the cruelty of a system aimed at stifling, by the mere inequality of the opposing forces, those who are completely defenceless.

I say that it is unfair to reduce grants in an irresponsible manner. I submit that responsibilities should be fully assumed and it should be readily admitted that the farming industry is no longer what it was, that it is profitable for a small number of farmers only. As for the others, they should give it up. The government should recognize that it is the sole responsible for the shaky situation prevailing and immediately invest huge sums of money to enable farmers to retrain.

In a word, the just society cannot tolerate any longer a farming policy which has remained constant through various political systems.

Agriculture is infinitely more sophisticated than has been suggested, and a number of those compelled to leave the farm will not likely be able to adjust any better to an industrial society. This makes the government's responsibilities only more tremendous.

I must say here incidentally that not only is it ill-advised but also indecent to tax eastern farmers more, while western farmers are getting more assistance. Both need help, and I think it particularly misleading to state that the subsidies paid in eastern Canada with respect to industry and exports are greater than those granted to western Canada. The farming community is involved. It must be looked after and that must be done without always taking into account the moneys given to others sectors of the economy.

In short, I want the government to admit it is the sole responsible for the present state of stagnation. If people must be retrained, nothing will be achieved by pushing them around. The just society requires that same society to pay the cost of correcting misguided efforts. Farmers must not be told that they must remain outside the affluent society and bear alone their misfortune.

● (2:50 p.m.)

I am asking the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Olson) cordially but forcefully to make [Mr. De Bané.]

the cabinet understand that it is not enough to recognize the heavy responsibility to assume for a particular economic sector, but that it must admit that retraining is the prime responsibility of the government, all the more as history tells us that the people who settled on farms did so with the blessing of the governments.

However, we now find that the federal and provincial governments are reluctant to tell the farmers that only a small number of them will be able to live off the farm. They are reluctant to admit that the responsibility for this situation lies entirely at the government's door and that the latter will entirely absorb the cost of retraining.

I wish to say, finally, that from now on, agriculture will only be economic for those who can run their farms according to the sophisticated methods of our time. Keeping this in mind, I feel it is imperative for the federal government to consider not only granting subsidies, but also making the services of experts available to those remaining on farms.

Finally, I would like to congratulate the minister on the various measures he has taken in related fields. I must however deplore the demagogic attitude of the opposition, particularly the official opposition, which gave the sad performance of people more interested in stirring up passions than in acknowledging the acute problems faced by the government.

[English]

Mr. John L. Skoberg (Moose Jaw): After listening to the minister speak in this debate, I am left wondering whether it is the intention of the department to put forward measures of real assistance to the agriculture industry or whether it is pursuing a policy of divide and rule, the policy being followed by this Government in so far as the Indian people are concerned.

The minister tells us that there are many who will concede that certain things have been done for the good of the agriculture industry. I am equally certain that there are many thousands of producers who will indicate areas in which nothing has been done by the department or by the government despite urgent need. I am sure the Minister without Portfolio (Mr. Lang) was pleased with the action of the Wheat Board in sending out letters on May 29 last demanding payment in connection with cash advances. I was pleased to hear the minister tell us today that instruc-