

Farmers are upset about it. Representations have been made to me on many occasions personally, by telephone and in writing. Surely it is not right.

In addition to the principle of the thing, it puts farmers in a very bad situation because in the case of the fruit and vegetable farmers they have already negotiated the price at which the product will be sold. Now they find they do not know what it will cost to produce because the wages have not been set.

In expanding on the question I asked about the way in which applications for offshore labour are circumscribed by certain conditions that the minister and his officials laid down. This brings up the whole question of offshore workers versus Canadian workers. I realize the minister is on the spot with high unemployment all across Canada, and when we ask for offshore labour it looks bad. Let me put the thing in proper perspective, however. Let us understand that less than 2 per cent of the farm labour force for seasonal farm labour is supplied from offshore. That means 98 per cent of the work is already being done by Canadians.

● (2212)

We would not be asking for any help if we could depend on the type of people provided by Manpower from among Canadians who profess to be interested in working on farms. The farm labour pools in co-operation with Canada Manpower Centres are now supposedly screening Canadians who suggest they want to be transported across Canada to work on farms. The directors of the Canadian Federation of Agriculture sent a resolution to the department saying the screening system was totally inadequate. If it were adequate we would not be getting the type of man who comes to work on a farm, works for a day or two and says "I don't like it", then quits and gets transportation back home. That is the reason the farmer is so interested in getting the type of worker he knows will stay, as is the case with offshore workers from the Caribbean Islands, from Mexico, and foreign students.

One thing that has caused farmers to be completely frustrated over this whole matter is the announcement made by the minister in March, I believe, that offshore labour will be admitted into Canada in the same numbers as last year. Every farmer expected to get the help he had last year. Now, when he goes to put in his order he finds the application circumscribed with so many conditions that he just cannot meet them. He is totally frustrated.

I suggested to the minister in my second question the other day that for the present, until he gets things ironed out, the same number of offshore workers be allowed in and be allowed to work on the same farms as they did last year. Then the hon. gentleman might sit down with the farmers, or the organizations which represent them, and find out whether some satisfactory method could be worked out for both the farmer who employs offshore labour and the Manpower centres which administer the program.

The government's attitude toward the offshore supplementary labour I have been talking about is really weighted against the farmer. The government and the ministry are

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looking only at the statistics. Since a great number of Canadians are unemployed, they are bringing in only a small number of offshore workers. After all, there is the human side. On one hand we have a Department of Agriculture which is supposed to assist the farmer; on the other we have another department throwing roadblocks in the farmer's way. The farmer is trying to get his crop off in the most efficient manner so that he may reap a return and maintain a decent standard of living. That is perhaps the root of the problem. I am almost certain, that there is not a single person advising the minister on his manpower program who has ever operated a farm or had to meet a payroll for employees working on a farm. If they did that they would have a totally different viewpoint.

I ask the minister again to take another look at the way this offshore labour program is being implemented. Do not get me wrong, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the type of work that is done by 98 per cent of the labour force who are Canadians, and especially by those who come from the locality in which the work is done. They know what it means to do farm work. They do an excellent job for the farmer. It is those people upon whom we cannot depend who cause the problem.

● (2217)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Raymond Dupont (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Employment and Immigration): Mr. Speaker, I am grateful to the hon. member for having given me notice of the question as to whether farmers have to sign a blank application form for foreign labourers allowing the salary to be filled in at a later date.

In the first place, with regard to the workers recruited under the programs for seasonal farm labourers from Mexico and the Caribbean, wage criteria are detailed in an agreement signed by the employer, the worker and a representative of the foreign government involved. According to the criteria which apply to the 1978 programs, the employer must pay foreign workers the same salary as that paid Canadian workers for the same work, provided that salary is not less than the minimum wage set for that occupation or less than the average wage paid last year for the crop concerned in the province in question.

Employers sign an offer of employment giving details on the work to be performed, and the salary. Because of the delay in establishing pay rates in effect last year in Ontario, employers are now asked, although temporary, to sign offers of employment specifying, under the salary, clause, that they agree to conform to the salary criteria outlined in the agreement between employer and worker. This temporary provision allows people from the Caribbean Islands and Mexico to come to Canada, if their services are immediately required, and simplifies the review of applications submitted by employers to recruit offshore workers who must come into Canada within a short time.

As the hon. member no doubt knows, in recent years some Ontario employers have expressed concern over the way the