

*Oral Questions***AGRICULTURE**

GRAIN FARMERS—DEFICIENCY PAYMENT

Mr. Maurice Foster (Algoma): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Agriculture. The Minister knows that farmers are facing the lowest grain prices in constant dollars since the 1930s and the Great Depression. In late August the Minister agreed in principle to a \$3 billion deficiency payment to Canadian farmers. Can the Minister give a commitment today as to when that payment will be made? When will the cheques be sent out so that farmers facing great uncertainty with world prices will know that this Government is going to follow through on that commitment which he apparently made to Canadian grain farmers in late August in Winnipeg?

Hon. John Wise (Minister of Agriculture): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the Hon. Member's question. Part of it is right and part is wrong. Of course the Hon. Member did not attend the farm leaders' meeting in Winnipeg on August 27.

Mr. Foster: I was not invited.

Mr. Wise: I am sure that if he checked with any of the 50 farm leaders who attended that meeting he would find that no commitment whatsoever was given with respect to the \$3 billion.

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Wise: Mr. Speaker, it was the third meeting of series two with reference to Special Canadian Grains No. 2. What happened at that meeting, as I have reported in this House numerous times, was that farm leaders almost unanimously agreed on a method of distribution. What is happening now is that officials of my Department are putting the numbers to that particular distribution formula. In fact, they are consulting on a day-to-day basis with the farm leadership seeking additional information.

The commitment that I gave was that if it met the fairness and equity test, then it would form part of the submission that I would make to the Government. But there was no commitment. Indeed, a year ago at this time there was no commitment on the dollars attached to the Special Canadian Grains Program. Today, of course, there is no commitment to the dollars attached—

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Wise: Hon. Members want the information, and I am trying to be forthcoming. As of today there is no commitment as to a price-tag on the program.

• (1150)

CANADA-UNITED STATES TRADE TALKS

Mr. Maurice Foster (Algoma): Mr. Speaker, this is the same type of stonewalling that we heard last October—

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Foster:—until Premier Devine screamed for a political bail-out in the Saskatchewan election. There is no Saskatchewan election this year. Grain is at the lowest prices since the 1930s, the engineers on the Seaway are on strike, in the next week or so the lock-men on the Seaway will go on strike. Surely there is enough uncertainty that the Government can stop stonewalling—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. As all Hon. Members know, this is an important matter. I would ask that the Hon. Member to put his question and I ask the Hon. Minister to answer it, succinctly.

Mr. Nystrom: Both of you.

Mr. Foster: Mr. Speaker, I was just getting to the question.

Is the hold-up because of the free trade negotiation that is going on with the United States? Is there uncertainty as to whether the agreement that is being hammered out in Washington, and in the Langevin Building today, whether or not this type of payment is permitted—

Mr. Speaker: I am sure that the Hon. Member can put his question.

Mr. Foster: Is the payment of \$3 billion which the Minister promised to the farmers on the free trade negotiation table, and is there uncertainty as to whether or not that will be permitted by the American agreement with Canada? Will the Minister clarify if that is the hold-up?

Mr. Gauthier: Now goes the truth.

Hon. John Wise (Minister of Agriculture): The only stone wall must be between the Hon. Member's ears.

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Broadbent: Cheap shot.

Mr. Wise: There is no stonewalling on the part of this Government whatsoever. The design and the program to consult with the Canadian farmers have nothing to do with the bilateral trade arrangements between Canada and the United States.

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CANADA POST CORPORATION

STRIKE BY INSIDE WORKERS—FRANCHISING ISSUE

Mr. Rod Murphy (Churchill): Mr. Speaker, it is nice finally to have the opportunity to ask a question.

Earlier in Question Period in response to a question, the Minister of Labour said that it is not yet time to appoint a mediator. In view of the fact that the postal workers have offered to negotiate on the issue of franchising, and have made