

Government Orders

Over recent weeks I have received correspondence from constituents who want this bill to pass. As usual our party has demonstrated its co-operation. I understand that today we will not only be passing this bill at report stage but my colleagues and I will be giving our unanimous consent to go to third reading, thereby demonstrating not only to the government but to all Canadians that we on our side of the House want to do whatever we can to assist the agricultural industry in Canada.

In a perfect world the amendment we are proposing this morning is something that would leave me a little uncomfortable because we are restricting the number of people who could have access to these funds. However, the sad reality is that with the cutbacks this government has imposed on the Farm Credit Corporation and on agriculture generally, funds are very scarce. As funds are very scarce, we must maximize their use.

My colleague from Algoma and others have spoken about how the number of loans continues to decrease. The number of active loans under the portfolio of the Farm Credit Corporation is actually going down. The number of loans in 1987-88 was 72,000; in 1988-89, 67,000; 1989-90, 63,000; 1990-91, 61,000; and 1991-92, 59,845. The number of loans continues to decrease.

What does that tell us? First of all, it tells us that the agricultural economy is doing very poorly. Then it speaks of some of the neglect of this government. It is not only the number of loans that is going down. Some people might be tempted to say those are merely consolidations and each loan may be greater in value, and therefore the agricultural community is getting the same benefit. That is not so.

• (1135)

In terms of the amount of dollars, the total was \$4.7 billion in 1987-88 and that figure progressively went down to the present year's total of \$3.5 billion. In other words, it went down \$1.2 billion, and that is not in inflation adjusted dollars. If we count the inflationary adjustment, resulting from the fact that each dollar is worth less today than it was then, then the loss is even greater than the \$1.2 billion figure I just mentioned.

We will be supporting this bill because it has merit. However, let there be no mistake. This bill does not bring salvation. This bill does not make the Conservative administration across the way acceptable to the agricultural community of Canada. The agricultural community

will remember the government across the way for what it has done.

I remember how this government talked about its commitment to supply management in 1984 and I remember a repeat of that commitment in 1988 during the free trade agreement debate.

An hon. member: What did it do about it?

Mr. Boudria: What did it do about it? First of all, we lost an awful lot in the free trade agreement. We all know of the loss of the ice cream and yoghurt provisions that we had because the government switched some items from the tariff list to the import control list, or at least it pretended it would. Mysteriously the then Minister of Agriculture resigned only a few days afterward and did not seek to run again in the last election.

To make matters even worse, there are also the cutbacks that have been imposed on the agricultural community since then. There was the decrease of \$638 million in the last mini budget. That is how much of a cut there was in the economic statement of last December, which some of us refer to as a mini budget. That figure even includes a \$38 million decrease in the dairy subsidy measures which the agricultural community had previously enjoyed.

We all know that this \$6.03 per hectolitre amount had been frozen for many years. At one time it represented something like 12 or 13 per cent of the revenue of dairy farmers. As a result of the fact that amount had remained fixed per hectolitre and the cost of production kept going up it eventually represented a smaller proportion, somewhere in the order of 8 per cent. Now there is not just the fact that this amount was frozen but there is an actual decrease of some \$38 million in the dairy subsidies.

The last thing the dairy farmers of Glengarry—Prescott—Russell wanted is for this government to renege on its commitment to protect the supply managed sector during the free trade agreement debate in 1988 and to actually start reducing the subsidies.

[*Translation*]

So farmers in my riding and elsewhere will long remember the Conservative government opposite. Today, of course, we intend to support this bill, because it is good, but we should still keep things straight. This bill does nothing to redeem the Conservatives opposite. The Conservatives have sinned and I assure you, Mr. Speak-