

Wheat Acreage Reduction

country. This has been a real disappointment because we cannot have national unity in this or any country by having only bilingual equality. It is necessary to preserve national unity.

I am a strong supporter of bilingualism and biculturalism. I am currently studying French in order to try to understand the one-third of this country that is French speaking. I think we should all make efforts of this sort. We are only fooling ourselves if we think this is going to hold Canada together—it will not. There must be economic and social changes. All regions of this country must feel they are equal partners in Confederation. If they do not, Canada as a nation may not celebrate its 150th or 200th birthday.

It is very ironic that the Prime Minister who preached national unity, the eradication of economic disparities and inequities, has up until now contributed more to disunity in this country than any Prime Minister in the history of Canada. He is not only destroying the pocketbook of western farmers but their very way of life. This is very important. Other hon. members have pointed out that not only is the farmer suffering, but the small businessman and everyone else in the west.

The farmer has planted wheat year after year. The government says to him, "Don't grow wheat; we cannot sell it." The farmer is not given any alternative. It is like going to the doctor and saying, "Listen, Doctor, don't practise medicine; we have not enough hospitals for you." This is going to put many of our small farmers in a very precarious position. The small farmers cannot be sent into the cities because they will find themselves in a very foreign and alienated environment. Those who are unskilled and untrained will be faced with unemployment and will become part of the urban poor.

The minister could help alleviate the situation today in Saskatchewan and, indeed, all across the Prairies. This is becoming a national issue. Soon it will concern not only the Prairie people: already people in Ontario in the machinery industry have been laid off, and people in industries directly related to agriculture will be laid off in the very near future.

● (12:10 a.m.)

The Minister without Portfolio from Saskatoon could be doing a great deal to help. The people of western Canada are counting on him. Every time I go out west people ask

me: "What is he really like? What will he do for us? Does he have the courage to face up to the Prime Minister?" Up to now I have said, "I hope he has. I have seen no evidence of it, but I think he will." I am not so sure, now. If the Minister without Portfolio does not have the courage to change government policy, he would be better off to resign as soon as possible. If he fails to do so, his leave of absence from the University of Saskatchewan will be over soon, as one member on this side remarked not long ago.

The situation is serious. Everyone involved is suffering financial hardship, not only the farmers but everyone in the province, particularly in a riding such as my own where most of the towns are relatively small and where everyone depends on farm income. Farm income has decreased, non-farm income has decreased. Unemployment has almost reached an all-time high and, as the hon. member for Regina East (Mr. Burton) has said, the population has declined. I believe the only province which experienced a decrease in population last year was Saskatchewan.

As to markets, I believe they are available. We need to embark on a new sales policy. People are hungry, and people who are hungry are willing to eat our wheat provided we can trade with them and build up a barter system. We shall have to do this very soon. Again I plead with the Minister without Portfolio to do something to change government policy and the direction it is taking. If he fails to do so, he will not be the only one to suffer; others in western Canada will be suffering handicaps in the very near future.

Mr. Gordon Ritchie (Dauphin): Mr. Speaker, I do not need to emphasize that the present wheat problem is very serious indeed. We who only three years ago were talking about growing all the wheat we could are now faced with the task of dealing with a carryover amounting to a billion bushels at the end of this crop year.

The factors which brought this situation about are many and varied. In the usual importing countries there has been a drive toward self-sufficiency through the greater utilization of fertilizers, new technology, water resources, pesticides and so on. For a time, at least, world cereal production seems to have caught up with world demand, with the consequence that there is a glut on the wheat markets of the world. Total wheat production increased 48 per cent between the years 1954-59 and 1966-67. The main factors