

Government Orders

farm populations in western, central or Atlantic Canada address their real needs.

I remember at the beginning of this debate my colleague for Saskatoon—Humboldt putting this into perspective. He said and I quote: “It is very doubtful that this bill is going to do much to improve farm viability or to reduce the exodus of population from rural communities. All it will do is reduce the cost of the crop insurance program to the federal government.”

I do not have to tell you, Mr. Speaker, that there is a financial crisis in agriculture today. The price of grain is too low to cover the increasing cost of production. Because of this, the Department of Agriculture is projecting a net loss in income for Saskatchewan producers in 1990.

Also, I do not have to tell you, Mr. Speaker, that my province has lost 55,000 people in the past five years. In my constituency the largest community is the city of North Battleford with a population of 15,000. In the past five years we have lost the equivalent of three and a half North Battleford Saskatchewanans, all because there has not been enough support for the people of rural Canada, the people of rural Saskatchewan and the agriculture industry.

Can we continue the loss of farmers off the land? Can we continue to lose young people from our rural communities, from our cities and from our province? No, we cannot. We certainly need more than a program which relies on higher premiums for producers and a greater contribution from the provincial Treasury to correct this problem. This crisis affects us all and all legislation, no matter how small or seemingly insignificant, must be directed at correcting the problem.

That means, first, increasing the revenues at the farm gate and, second, decreasing the cost of the debt now running at \$22 billion, an almost unbelievable amount at the farmgate, considering how valuable agriculture is to the future stability of our entire economy.

Bill C-48, an act to amend the Crop Insurance Act, does nothing to address either of these matters. This bill sets out the terms under which the federal government will contribute to provincial crop insurance schemes. It is an opportunity to express the federal government's

commitment to the industry and acknowledge the value that that industry holds for our country.

I know that the federal government does not have jurisdiction on crop insurance and it is not responsible for designing the crop insurance scheme. But that does not mean that the federal government does not have an interest in ensuring that the insurance practices in one province are the same as in another, and that all producers, no matter where they farm, have the same degree of protection that the insurance schemes provide.

With Bill C-48 we see the opposite happening. New Democrats concerned about the future of agriculture will not stand idly by and accept this. The government had undertaken consultations prior to drafting C-48 and listened intently, I expect, to representations made during the committee hearing process. But the bill has not been drafted to assist farmers, as the consultations led us to believe. Its only purpose is to continue the government's plan of reducing its own responsibilities to Canadians.

Let there be no mistake. This government would rather not have to deal with the problems of our economy. That is its philosophy. It is a philosophy that will drive farmers off the land and return agriculture to the control of the private sector which nearly bankrupted the entire industry just a few decades ago. The fact that this legislation is before us today leads me to believe that other initiatives being undertaken by this government are expected to produce the same result.

Perhaps my greatest concern lies with the government's initiated review of the operations of the Canadian Wheat Board because, if it is the intention of government to get out of the business of government, the goal for the Canadian Wheat Board is to get out of that business and not act for the farmer as it has been doing until now.

You will remember, Mr. Speaker, that in November, 1988, there was a general election in this country. Prior to that election there was a great deal of concern about the future of the Canadian Wheat Board because the then proposed free trade agreement was threatening its existence. The government said, “No way, we are committed to the Canadian Wheat Board. The free trade agreement does not affect the Wheat Board. The existence of the Wheat Board is secure”.