

Government Orders

They complained about prices, high interest rates, uncertainty caused by government policy and the inequities of the drought program.

Russell Lakusta, of Wandering River in northeastern Alberta, complained that he cannot afford to turn his grain farm over to his son.

"Farmers are in very poor shape", he said. "If we don't get federal help, lower interest rates and get to the point where farmers break even—" At that point, his voice broke and the sentence trailed off.

Later the longtime Conservative said he does not find the government particularly sympathetic to the farmer's plight, despite the record of subsidies.

"I still think the government is sorry for the \$3 billion they gave us," he said in an interview. "I don't know why. I think if it hadn't been for Grant Devine's election, we wouldn't have gotten that either."

I might add that another billion dollars would be very welcome in the prairie economy but you can bet the last dollar of those billions that it will not buy Grant Devine another election.

Farmer Bill Cole, from Ninette, Man., was equally blunt.

He was angry about the loss of the interest-free advance payment program this year and the way the drought payment was handled. Payments were late, administration too cumbersome and in too many cases, farmers are being asked to pay back thousands of dollars already received in interim payments, he said in an interview.

On his own farm, Cole received a \$7 an acre interim payment and then, instead of the additional payment he expected to cover his bills, he received a notice from Ottawa that he had been overpaid by 52 cents an acre. He has to pay it back.

I might add that the appeal process is in total chaos. The structure that has been set up puts all the burden on rural municipalities which in no way have the resources to deal with what is happening in that drought payment. Reeves and councillors are getting calls in the middle of the night, families are being divided because one brother will get a payment when he had a pretty good crop and the next brother gets nothing, is wiped out and driven out of business. It is causing all kinds of stress in the rural community.

• (1610)

In any event, getting back to the words of Cole, he said:

"That program was a disaster", said Cole, a member of the executive in grains minister Charlie Mayer's constituency organization.

This is one of the Minister of Grains and Oilseeds' own constituency executive members. He said:

"I told Charlie last week to his face, you have two chances for re-election: slim and none."

I think that is pretty blunt talk. I do not think you can put it any clearer than that.

Other delegates had other complaints.

A young Quebec farmer said the government should do more to help young people stay on the land.

An Ontario dairy farmer said reducing government regulation is not the answer.

A Prince Edward Island delegate warned that low prices and a lack of government action will send many family farms into the grasp of multinational, vertically-integrated food companies.

A southern Saskatchewan nurse said farmers are turning to alcohol, drugs and suicide because of poor conditions and a lack of government support.

I might stress again that this is not something dreamed up by wild-eyed New Democrats in some back room. This is a report from the debate at the Conservative convention. These are direct quotes.

Mr. Cardiff: Who wrote that?

Mr. Funk: The member opposite asks who wrote that. These are direct quotes from their own delegates and I hope he was there to hear those things said because I think that is very clearly the voice of the whole farm community speaking.

With that I would like to reiterate that the bill we have before us, the bill to charge interest on cash advance payments, is just one more example of this government's agriculture policies that are being rejected from coast to coast as not only being unworkable but very likely to lead to the demise of agriculture in this country as we know it and to hasten the demise of the most valued institution in rural Canada, the family farm.

This government may think that, as some analysts at their convention said, it does not have to worry about the farm population any more because the Conservative Party has become the party of the upwardly mobile people in the suburbs. If you look at a map of Canada you can see how many constituencies there are that elect rural members in this country. It is not possible for this government to form a government again without rural members. This government may think that farmers cannot remember three years. Farmers can remember a lot longer than that and I hope that the government pays attention to what farmers are saying to them.