

Now we have the same situation again. When Conservatives have been in office for a couple of years, you find that the depression that overtakes the agricultural community reaches desperation point.

I know that a lot of criticism was levelled at the previous government, but you cannot find any farmer in western Canada today who would not trade what he had under the previous government for what he has today.

Senator Murray: I will get you some quotations on exactly that point.

Senator Olson: We would like to have some, and we would also like to have some action.

Senator Argue: You will need all you can get.

Senator Barootes: The farmers did not vote for your party in the last two provincial elections.

Senator Olson: You are absolutely right. I know that every generation seems to have to learn the same lesson about the consequences of the election of a Conservative government, and, believe me, they are learning it now in spades.

The other day I asked the Leader of the Government when the government will make an announcement so that farmers can have some idea of what the initial payment for grain is going to be. He said that it would probably be done by the middle of April. For my own benefit, I checked the practice of the past, because I seem to recall that years ago the announcement was made just before the new crop year, which begins on August 1. There was a change in policy about 18 years or so ago. We were going to move the date of the announcement back so that it would be made early enough in the year so that farmers would know in advance what the possible Canadian Wheat Board price for any particular grain, whether it be wheat, oats, barley or whatever, might be.

As a matter of fact, it was also determined at that time that the initial price would be the floor price. In other words, if a deficit showed up in those pools, it would be paid by the federal treasury rather than by going to the farmers and asking them to repay some money. That happened this year. I think it is about \$200 million in deficit from the initial payments that were made for this crop year.

Moving the announcement to a date earlier in the year was done to give farmers and their banks, credit unions, and so on, some indication so that they could make arrangements for the credit they needed to seed the crops. Why was it put off to the middle of April, which is far too late for any part of the southern prairies? One of the reasons for my concern is that the Leader of the Government apparently does not understand that the farmers have to know in March whether they will get enough credit to purchase the seed, chemicals to treat the seed, herbicides and all of the other necessary supplies. In case he does not know, spring arrives in the southern prairies around the first part of April. Farmers need to make those arrangements a little earlier than that. I hope that some action will be taken in this regard.

[Senator Olson.]

● (1500)

This year it is highly likely that the amount of initial payment is going to be all the farmers will get for their crops. I know there is some risk involved in that. But when the price has already declined by approximately 35 to 40 per cent since this government took office, surely it can screw up enough courage to do something to assist these farmers.

Senator Frith: They screw up everything else, so why not?

Senator Olson: That's right, they screw up everything else.

Senator Argue: Be careful now—or don't be careful!

Senator Olson: I hope that the Leader of the Government understands the gravity of the situation and that he will inform his colleagues of it so that something can be done. There is nothing hypothetical or probable about it—it is a fact that the farmers are going to their bankers now and are being turned away because they are unable to give the banks and credit unions any solid evidence of what their income may be. We do not know what the price is going to be. The government will have to decide. The projected revenue is the basis upon which farmers can get credit for operating expenses, so the amount of the initial payment is critical for all of the grain producers. I want to repeat that the release of this information in the middle of April is not satisfactory. It is too late then.

I want to make one other point regarding Senator Barootes' claim that this government has made available \$3.2 billion of Canadian revenue in assistance to western grain farmers. I presume that that amount includes the billion dollars in the Special Canadian Grains Program. We have only just received Supplementary Estimates (A) for the fiscal year 1987-88 for \$700 million of that program. Those estimates were studied in the National Finance Committee this morning. That money has not been paid out yet, because the government does not yet have authority to pay it out. There is some deception in this. Why was that amount not put in the main estimates? I do not understand why not. We knew weeks ago that it was to be \$700 million, or at least the government claimed to have known it because it announced that there would be \$1 billion paid out, about 30 per cent in the first tranche and 70 per cent later on. The \$700 million in Supplementary Estimates (A) is the second tranche, and the authority will be given to pay it out some time in May.

It is this sort of deception that is going on. Anyone who is familiar with how these estimates are put together can understand why it is being done this way—it is so that the Main Estimates that were presented in the other place by the President of the Treasury Board, Mr. de Cotret, could be \$700 million less. If the government knew what the amount was going to be, it should have put it into the Main Estimates. Who are you trying to fool? This is going to catch up to you. It does constitute government by deception, trying to make things appear to be something other than what they really are.

Senator Barootes: Does the senator believe that this money will not be paid?