

*Government Orders*

We all—even political opponents—applauded Mr. Diefenbaker. It was the second thing he did after he was sworn in. He implemented a system of interest-free cash advances on prairie grains. All of us, political friend and foe alike, applauded Mr. Diefenbaker because we ran into stubborn Liberal governments in the 1940s and early 1950s which did not listen. They would not listen and that was why they were defeated.

I have noted that they have not repented their sins. I hope one day one of them will get up and say how wrong they were on this and a number of other items.

**Mr. Milliken:** Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I was going to deal with the fact that he is talking about Liberal governments.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bird):** What is your point of order, please?

**Mr. Milliken:** It is that we are debating a government bill and there is no minister of the Crown in this House. It is a principle of responsible government that a minister be here. This is a government bill—this is not Private Members' Hour—and there is not a single Minister in this House.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bird):** Order, please. I am advised that you are incorrect in reflecting on the presence or absence of members.

**Mr. Benjamin:** I do not mind the interruption, but I cannot think of a minister over there who I want in the place anyway, especially when I consider the hon. member for Vegreville, whom I really like. He is a good friend. We have been associates here for a long time. We were both members of the class of '68. He was one of the strongest of all in the fight for interest-free cash advances. He was one of the strongest of all.

Would you believe it was the same with VIA Rail? Today, he repeated a firm commitment to supply management and orderly marketing and marketing boards. I have been saddened to the verge of tears about that hon. gentleman who I think is basically an honest, decent man because he has stopped getting up to fight for what is right. How this piece of legislation could get past a committee of cabinet with the hon. member for Vegreville being present is beyond me. That is a very sad case, in my opinion.

The interest charges on those cash advances, initially on prairie grains and then subsequently on all crops right across Canada, have been more than recovered in other ways. In effect, it has not cost the government any money. Certainly it also has not cost our economy any money, but it has benefited our economy if for no other reason that just on our export markets, particularly in commodities that were not under marketing boards or supply management. Our farmers were subject to what was called, and still is, the market-place.

Of course when the market-place got flooded with lots of vegetables, fruits or whatnot, the price went right through the floor. But what else could they do? Commodities that could be stored and kept for some length of time took a beating. Farmers and fishermen are the only ones I know of who are price takers, not price setters. All the rest of our economy, all our professional people, all our unionized workers negotiate a price or set a price on what they are producing or the services or labour they are selling. Only farmers and fishermen have to take what they can get. They have always had to take less than what it costs to produce.

I have never been able to understand why any country, let alone this one, would allow that to happen. If we paid our fishermen and our agricultural producers their cost of production plus a decent living, and in order to help those who could not afford the higher cost of food, there are other programs to offset the high cost of food such as school lunch programs, and subsidies for the low income, the poor, and the elderly, then no longer would the finger be pointed at farmers and fishermen about the subsidies they are getting. It would be a consumer subsidy, and the farmers and the fishermen would be in the same category as the corporate community and the manufacturers and the processors who can set their price. Don't tell me about competition in the market-place, no matter what it is in, but I am particularly acquainted with transportation.

• (1330)

A railway sets a rate, the other railway has the same rate. An airline sets a fare, the other airline has the same fare. It goes on all the time. Lawyers have their fee schedules and if one lawyer starts cutting those fees too much he is in trouble with the law society. The same with architects and accountants, you name it.