

Adjournment Debate

I asked the minister last March, and again today, about a joint emergency drought approach involving the prairie provincial governments, and about a sharing of information with the United States. I understand there have been no such meetings with the governments of Alberta and Saskatchewan. If they have taken place, let the minister say so and put out a positive press release. Why be so secretive? Western farmers are aware of the concern, and of the quick response and action taken by United States federal government agencies with respect to their vast drought areas.

On Tuesday of this week the government of Alberta announced a crash program for deep water well drilling and the companion to it, a program for pumping and pipelining water for both stock water and small town domestic use. I ask the minister again, now, will the federal government enter into a cost-sharing arrangement with Alberta and the other Prairie provinces on this and other emergency programs? Failure to act now, or at least to give a firm indication of federal action, will only contribute to a further degree of disaster in the west.

Almost all related agricultural industries and most service industries are hurting badly today in western Canada. Farm machinery sales are down between 30 per cent and 45 per cent from levels of one year ago. Receipts at Prairie stockyards have jumped in the last three weeks or more by as much as 40 per cent, and in southeast Alberta, by 50 per cent. It is now inevitable that the Prairie cattle industry will suffer more than the grain industry, and a continued drought could lead to a drastic reduction in western cattle populations, at the very time markets and prices are definitely on the upturn.

The drought situation demands co-operation and action by the three principals involved. Farmers, especially cattle producers, have already made significant sacrifices by drastically reducing their herd numbers to fit their grass and feed supplies. At least some provincial governments have already acted. Is it too much to ask for leadership and immediate action from our federal government now?

In closing, I thank the Minister of Agriculture for attending in the House this evening. Perhaps the minister could use his influence with the Minister of National Defence (Mr. Danson) and the Minister of Regional Economic Expansion (Mr. Lesnard) to open immediately the Suffield PFRA pasture for use this year.

Hon. E. F. Whelan (Minister of Agriculture): Mr. Speaker, let me comment first on what the hon. member said about praying for rain. I was quite serious when I told the House of Commons that I hoped our people would pray for rain. The hon. member's leader said at the time, "Is that all that the Minister of Agriculture has to offer the farmers of western Canada, prayer and fertilizer?" Yesterday the hon. member's

former leader, the right hon. member for Prince Albert (Mr. Diefenbaker), after hearing the Minister of Regional Economic Expansion reply to his supplementary question, as reported on page 5275 of *Hansard*, said:

Mr. Speaker . . . I would ask him whether the original plan suggested by the Minister of Agriculture, that he was going to pray for rain, has been departed from?

It has rained recently in western Canada, Mr. Speaker. Of course, all the meetings of our agriculture, DREE and environment officials did not bring on the rain, but I think it is in order to say a prayer of thanks for the rain we received.

The hon. member referred to some comments of mine, as reported in a Canadian magazine. I think I was reported by a newspaper yesterday as saying that when I saw the article I knew I would be in trouble, because people would write me letters about what I had said. I said that the marketing system for beef was older than Christ. They were using a marketing system in those times, and it goes back at least to those days. I have used such terminology many times. I have said that the marketing system is older than Christ. Mr. Speaker, Christ threw the money changers out of the temple, because of the way they were trading. It was practically the same in beef. That means it is nearly 2,000 years old. I said it is as outdated as that marketing system.

● (2220)

The hon. member holds up the article. However, he does not point out all the good things. Anyone who knows me and knows how I live my life, knows that I am not kidding when I suggest that they pray for rain or pray for anything else. I may not appear to be a strong believer, but I am. These prayers have been answered. I see that when I look at the rainfall in the west. As late as yesterday morning the weather experts said they could see no rain.

Early in the year, in fact last fall, our people were concerned about moisture conditions as well as snow conditions in the mountains. We had continual reports on this throughout the year. We have done more than the United States. In the United States they might have been meeting with their governors. We will exchange this information with the United States Secretary of Agriculture and exchange aid and so on.

I will conclude by saying that if the hon. member would do a little more praying instead of making so much noise, it would do more good. We will be making a statement in the House tomorrow on our progress.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ethier): Order, please. The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 11 a.m.

At 10:24 p.m. the House adjourned, without question put, pursuant to Standing Order.