

Adjournment Motion

respect to which there are now voluntary controls, and of other commodities which we can produce and control, such as steel, lumber, iron, copper, nickel and so on. We could effectively control such commodities. That would help the producers of this country who are farmers as well as consumers. The government ought to do these things because they would help farmers and consumers as well.

I remind the parliamentary secretary that, today, the farmer and the agricultural community are the backbone of our economy. If things go well for the farmer, the chances are that they will go well for many others in our society as well. In the future, I think we shall find that there will be shortages particularly in two fields, energy and food. There will be a real future in agriculture for the farmers of Canada if only we give the farmers a chance, give them some opportunities. There will be a snowball effect if the farmer has that opportunity; because, in the processing and growing of food and in the development of export markets, there is a tremendous growth potential.

We might begin by expanding the powers of the Food Prices Review Board and giving it power to look at farm input costs, particularly in cases where farm input costs are excessively high. It should also look into such areas as lumber, energy, iron, steel, farm machinery, and farm machinery parts and repairs. In saying this I am reflecting the views, certainly, of the rural parts of the Prairies. I urge the minister most seriously to look at the ideas put forward, as they may contain, possibly, solutions for making our country a better place in which to live.

Mr. Mark MacGuigan (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Manpower and Immigration): Mr. Speaker, when the hon. member posed his question to the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Whelan) on June 12 of this year, he will recall that the minister expressed confidence that the Food Prices Review Board would be looking into farm input prices.

In its first quarterly report, published on September 26 of this year, the board did in fact devote a section of the third chapter to this very question of farmers' costs and prices. The hon. member may have noted in the report that a considerable portion of the increase in the annual rate of change in farm input price indices for the first six months of 1973, over the same period in the previous year, I would refer to hon. member to table 5, page 17 of the report, was attributable to trade in farm produce between one farmer and another. The highest increases were noted in the rate of change for feed prices, at 34.1 per cent; for seed prices, at 31.6 per cent; and in feeder cattle prices, which changed by 25.9 per cent. These increased prices were reflected in increases in farmers' incomes and generally indicated a rather buoyant situation in the farm economy.

The hon. member for Yorkton-Melville (Mr. Nystrom) suggested that we ought to impose controls over certain commodities. He mentioned energy, steel, lumber, iron, copper, nickel and so on. I draw the hon. member's attention to the fact that, for example, the comparative increase in the price of farm machinery was only 2.4 per cent, and of petroleum products, only 2.7 per cent. I therefore fail to see any connection between the point he tried to make and the factual situation.

[Mr. Nystrom.]

While it is true that the farmer has had to bear higher prices for non-farm commodities, including farm building replacements and repairs, together with some increase in labour costs, and I would refer the hon. member again to table 5, farmers' returns on an average basis were well above farm input prices during the first half of 1973, as shown by chart 4, page 19 of the report, and they have continued to be so.

The second quarterly report of the Food Prices Review Board is expected shortly. I believe the board has also stated before the standing committee that it is doing a study on feed gains, and these additional reports may further elucidate the problem.

● (2220)

UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE—POSSIBILITY OF CHARGING EMPLOYERS AND EMPLOYEES EMPLOYMENT RATED PREMIUMS

Mr. Don Blenkarn (Mississauga): Mr. Speaker, tonight I want to refer to questions I directed to the Minister of Manpower and Immigration (Mr. Andras), as recorded at page 8565 of *Hansard*. I want to first talk about the question of topping up wages, as set out in my supplementary question. Unfortunately, industry, business and labour have to some extent got to know how to play the game with unemployment insurance. That is probably because of the rules. When you make rules or laws, people learn how to use them.

In the construction industry, there is a common practice of employees winding up a work week that is almost referable to the hours of daylight. As the season progresses, there are shorter and shorter work weeks. Indeed, throughout the fall there are periods of rain, periods where it is impossible to do anything. It has become a practice to use holiday pay to, in effect, top up wages by paying holidays for one or two days a week. The effect is that when an employee is eventually laid off because of the inclemency of the weather, he has had his holidays. When he applies for unemployment insurance, after the two week waiting period he is able to immediately claim unemployment insurance because the wages have been topped up at the maximum rate. In effect, he and his employer have used the system. Usually this is someone who does fairly highly specialized work. Because he is from an area where there is not likely to be part-time employment for him, he is able to draw unemployment insurance for the bulk of the off-season period, and that is not just winter.

I will refer to the construction industry, logging industry, the auto industry, the Great Lakes shipping industry, the farming industry and to some extent the board of education in terms of secretarial help for schools. Industry has been able to use the fund to keep its employees grouped together during the slack period or offseason. They have quite a method of doing things. I received a letter today from Hutt Fence Limited, which is in the fence construction business. It states that their employees are concerned. They want to have their holiday pay. They want it blended in with their regular payment so that when they apply for unemployment insurance, they will get it immediately after the two-week waiting period.