

Government Orders

regions of this country. Now he has disappeared. He is no longer fighting for the farmer. He has decided to stand aside and let the banks and the international grain companies have their way. It is too bad.

This is an important change in the way the government conducts the business of this country. It was an extremely important initiative when Prime Minister John Diefenbaker introduced it back in 1957. It did tremendous good for rural Canada and improved and streamlined the grain handling system of this country. To take it away now can only do irreparable harm. I think that this bill should be dropped. We are fighting it in the House. When it goes to committee, we will be hearing from the farm organizations which will continue to fight. The government has to be stopped on this particular piece of legislation.

Mr. Bob Speller (Haldimand—Norfolk): Mr. Speaker, it is a real pleasure for me to stand in this House today on behalf of the people of Haldimand—Norfolk and to talk about Bill C-36 which is an act to amend the Advanced Payments for Crops Act and the Prairie Grain Advance Payments Act.

Today we are witnessing the dismantling and demise of just one more program by this government; one more agricultural program that farmers throughout Canada have enjoyed.

Haldimand—Norfolk is an area which is rich in farmland, an area where we have a number of tobacco farmers about which I have stood up in the House on many occasions and spoken. The tobacco farmers are one of the key farming groups that have always used this program. Quite frankly, when I was back in the riding last week, a number of them came to me. They were very shocked about the treatment they have been getting from this government, especially since during the last election the part-time minister of agriculture came into my riding and indicated to tobacco farmers that, yes, the government would support them, that the government was committed to farming.

In fact, he went on to say that the government was committed to supply management and to all of farming. On the free trade deal, the minister said that agriculture would be protected, that our markets in the United States would be protected. We have seen that those markets have not been protected. This bill is just another indication that the government is not committed to farming, that the government is committing itself to budget deficit reduction on the backs of Canadian farmers and on the backs of those people who are least able to afford to pay.

• (1240)

In the past, this program has provided farmers with interest-free government loans up to \$30,000 on their storable crops, repayable when the crop was sold. This program has ensured that producers can obtain cash in advance from lenders, knowing that they will receive payments for their crops at some later date. In other words, up until now the government was putting its financial strength behind the farmer, a sign that it really and truly believed in agriculture in Canada. Well, we saw what happened after the last election. As I pointed out earlier, we have seen that there are a number of different programs on which this government has broken its promise.

The government is now proposing to amend the act and remove the interest-free provision, while maintaining the loan guarantee. It estimates that by eliminating the interest subsidy there will be a saving of approximately \$27 million in each of the years 1989-90 and 1990-91. This is a minor amount to this government. The government has indicated that it does not feel that this part of the program is essential.

It is coming to the stage where this government feels very little is essential any more, especially in the area of farming. Whereas the Canadian Government used to help its farmers, it is now apparent the trend is to throw them to the wolves; let them take care of themselves.

In this instance the government has not totally gutted the program, it has simply taken away a key aspect of the program, and in the end the government is making it unaffordable and inaccessible to most farmers. I think this shows the government's commitment to farming, the government's understanding of farming, and it shows, by the lack of any minister of the Crown within this House, that the government does not really care. This has become a common practice for the government and I feel that it is unacceptable.