

Government Orders

The legislation before us today is really not what some people would have you believe it is; a safety net program for farmers. It is not a safety net program for farmers. There is nothing wrong with the legislation, as I said before. It goes further, I suppose, than legislation has in the past because this is really a consolidation of all of those income support programs that were in existence in the federal and provincial laws in some of the western Canadian provinces. However, it is certainly not the all-encompassing program that it was made out to be by the Government of Canada.

That brings me back to the principle of the legislation because that is what we are debating today, the principle of the legislation, the principle of guaranteeing an income to a farmer, or guaranteeing an income to a primary producer.

It should be made clear and put on the record that to guarantee an income to a primary producer, apart from our social welfare safety net, is perhaps more important in economic terms than guaranteeing the income of perhaps any other group of people in our society.

I say that because economically speaking on the balance sheet, it helps our balance of payments. It helps the respect for our dollar on the international money market if we are exporting products from this country. In fact, we could not survive if we did not have something in the books that said our dollars were being used in exchange on the international money market.

I realize there are various ways that you can have a healthy financial situation *vis-à-vis* the United States or any other nation in the world on your balance of payments. You could be exporting tourism. That is true. Americans could come into Canada and spend dollars here, and that is an export on your financial ledger when you judge the value of that commodity in a country like Canada. You could have investment from foreign nations. That is another help on your balance of payments, because dollars are being spent here and foreign money is being exchanged for Canadian products. The export commodities of our primary producers, of our farmers, loggers, miners and fishermen and other primary producers in our society are perhaps more important than any of the other commodities, because when you talk

about farming or fishing, you are talking about food. You are talking about food, which is indispensable.

You cannot judge in economic terms, the value of a computer chip versus food. There is just no comparison in real terms. There might be in the mind of an accountant or an economist. Certainly, in reality, we should be paying more attention to our primary producers in this country.

I make the point: Why not have guaranteed income programs for all of our primary producers in this country? Why not have a guaranteed income or a stabilizing of income for our loggers in this country and for those people who work in our paper mills? Why not have a guaranteed income for our fishermen and our fish plant workers? Why set them adrift? There is not one income support program in existence in the Statutes of Canada. There is not one legislative measure that was ever brought in to give income support to our primary producers in the fishing industry or in the logging industry. Not one.

Members could point toward the prices support boards we have. But that is after the fact. That is much after the fact, after the individual has either been driven into bankruptcy or has sold off all of his possessions because of the nature of the work.

These professions are at the mercy of weather conditions and international markets. That is why they need the support of the Government of Canada.

I would say, as I mentioned before, the intent and the principle of the legislation is good. But I do not think it measures up to what a real farm income protection act should be. Perhaps the Government of Canada can build on this and perhaps it can come up with an act that will not be dependent upon how much money a farmer has or whether a provincial government decides to cost share on this particular program.

Mr. Ken Hughes (MacLeod): Madam Speaker, I thank the hon. member for what clearly was a remarkable degree of knowledge on a bill relating to an area on which I know he would have had to do a great deal of research to understand. It would not come to him naturally because only a few of his constituents would be involved in this sort of business.

An hon. member: Particularly the primary ones.