

*Business of Supply*

is needed is someone who would be in complete command, who would have the authority to act when action is required and when it could be taken much quicker than if it had to have approval of the minister or the House of Commons.

I hope, therefore, the minister will look at the plan he has for the filling of this space, will consult with those who have some knowledge of the situation and be prepared to change the plan and adopt an extraordinary technique in order to provide cash for the farmers now.

**Mr. Gordon Ritchie (Dauphin):** Mr. Speaker, in rising to take part in this debate I do so in the hope that today's discussion will do much more than simply focus attention on a few specific weaknesses in our present system of handling and marketing wheat.

I believe it is essential that all Canadians realize that these are merely symptoms of a general malaise that is sapping the strength of a large and important segment of our society and of an industry that is vital to Canada's economic well-being. I am hopeful that this discussion will at last bring home to the government, and the people of Canada, that the agricultural industry and the farm community of this country must be preserved in the national interest. The farm unit must be retained and strengthened for sound social and economic reasons. In the prevailing depressed state of the grain trade, individual farms are disappearing fast, properties are being broken up and going out of production and farmers are leaving the land for good.

• (5:20 p.m.)

One of the long-term contributing factors undoubtedly is the lack of adequate government support for agriculture. It has recently been calculated that federal government expenditure on agriculture works out to about \$286 per person active in farming in Canada. In the United States, the equivalent figure is \$1,287 per head for such things as research, extension, price stability and so on. The myth is firmly established in this country's urban areas, and apparently too in the inner circles of government, that Canadian farmers, particularly western grain producers, are a pampered political pressure group that prospers on government hand-outs at the expense of other Canadians. The per capita figures on government expenditure in Canada and the United States that I have just quoted give the lie to that myth.

But there is other sound evidence to the contrary. For instance, the net out-put per

man in commercial industry in Canada has increased at an annual rate of 3.5 per cent since 1946. In the seven major industrial groups used in that calculation, agriculture was best with an annual rate of increase of 5.5 per cent. Since 1961, the rate of increase has been even better. Agriculture's net output per man shot up to an annual rate of 6.5 per cent while the productivity of other commercial industry declined and limped along at 2.9 per cent. This dramatic increase in productivity has been made at the expense of farm labour and agricultural employment. But while the purely agricultural population has shrunk, agriculture as an industry has contributed in an outstanding manner to national productivity and national prosperity.

A recent economic survey in the United States showed that some 30 per cent of all employment in that country was farm based, that is, dependent upon the requirements of the industry of agriculture in its widest sense. I do not know of any similar study for Canada, but I believe it would be even higher than 30 per cent in this country. With this in mind, I am sure the government owes it to western agriculture at this point in time to take a good look at its present condition, and to be ready with subsidies, either in the form of payments on farm stored grain or acreage payments for this coming year. These measures would tide Western agriculture over this very difficult period of its existence.

Despite that fact that agriculture today enjoys only 11 per cent of Canada's total merchandise trade, it still accounts for more than \$1 billion a year in balance of payments credits, and as recently as three years ago this was nearly \$2 billion. These figures alone I believe are enough to give Canadians some rough idea of the magnitude of the agricultural industry and of its tremendous importance to our business and social life.

One of the major afflictions besetting the industry today is a situation regarding the grain trade. One cannot talk about the grain trade without immediately coming slap up against the Canadian Wheat Board and the other government apparatus that has grown up over the years to handle what, in all important aspects, is really a federal government monopoly.

I have no wish to throw stones at the Canadian Wheat Board, or to make life more difficult than it already is for the board and its members. I think they are probably as much victims of circumstances and government disinterest and lethargy as they are of a failure to keep abreast of the times and the