

*Farm Loans Interest Rebate Act*

to bear the brunt of unemployment increasing by 50 per cent over the same period.

I am speaking about a devastating attack on the economy of Leeds-Grenville. I have yet to hear anything from the other side of the House which will even come close to relieving the pressures created by the Government's irresponsibility. I am speaking about Canadians who have lost all sense of security and no longer trust their Government, and I am referring to hundreds of families who must now rely on unemployment insurance benefits with nothing to look forward to but the welfare lines for their bread and butter. It is very hard for the people of my riding to live on depreciating incomes when they have children to feed and clothe, but the people of Leeds-Grenville are determined to survive the worst recession they have had to face since the great depression. They survived then and they will survive now, and I am here to make sure they get all the help they need. I am here to make sure this Government hears about their concerns and hears about their problems. They elected me to tell the Government how tough it has become to meet their mortgage payments, how tough it has become to put good, wholesome food on the table, and how tough it has become to make sure their children have the warm clothing they need for the long, hard winter the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) promised us earlier this fall.

Leeds-Grenville has a rich agricultural community, strong in dairy and meat producers. Over 1,800 farmers are scattered throughout both of the counties and, as I visited many of them during my recent campaign travels, I was told countless times, "This farm is inoperative". I ask this House, when will we make these farms operative again?

Forty per cent of Canada's economy is made up of the agrifood industry, and we cannot afford to ignore such a large sector of this great country's potential. If we do, we will also be ignoring the merchant who will no longer have enough products to sell, and we will be ignoring the factory worker who will no longer have a job when his firm stops producing farm machinery because there is no longer a market for these items. The importance of stabilizing this industry cannot be emphasized enough when it affects so many people connected directly or indirectly with the production of life's essential commodity, food.

Because the agricultural industry is so important to my riding and to each and every person in this country, I was very pleased to see some positive action taken by this Government through Bill C-134, but I cannot say that I, or any of the farmers in Leeds-Grenville, believe that the Bill will provide them with the relief they so desperately need to survive at a time when their costs far exceed their incomes.

Farm bankruptcies are now 65 per cent higher than last year, and the numbers are still climbing, with farmers in Ontario being hardest hit. In the last 12 months, 261 farmers went bankrupt and were forced to watch helplessly as their livestock, their barns and their machinery were sold off at rock bottom prices because creditors could no longer wait to have their long outstanding debts paid. This Bill will be retroactive to June 28, but how many farmers have already lost everything for which they worked all their lives, farms that have been

passed down from one generation to another, because that assistance was not there when they needed it? I ask this Government to explain what will happen now to those farmers.

Our farming community is made up of hardworking, proud people, battling against the toughest elements nature could hurl at them, and surviving. They are not looking for handouts. They are looking for a little assistance that will help them continue the fight against the onslaught of escalating costs of production, the constantly rising price of energy, fuel, herbicides, fertilizers and machinery.

Every aspect of the farming operation has faced increased costs. However, a farmer's net income is expected to be 17 per cent lower this year than last year. Just how does this Government expect our farmers to continue to operate when they are faced with such devastating losses? Our farmers need assistance now to buy new machinery to replace worn out harvesters and milking machines. They need assistance now to expand their operations so that they can keep up with the market demands of the future, not the market demands of the past. And they need the support of the Federal Government now, not six months or 12 months from now. All the Government is doing is to introduce a Bill from which, the Canadian Federation of Agriculture estimates, only 500 farmers will actually benefit. That is only 2.5 per cent of the 20,000 farmers who need assistance today. The generosity of the Government is overwhelming.

It is long past the time that this Government realized that Canada needs a stable, thriving agricultural industry and a stable, thriving economy. It is time the Government took the necessary steps to stop us from plummeting down the road to economic disaster, to stop the rising and unbearable level of unemployment, to stop the extravagant and wasteful overspending of the past 14 years.

We have lands, resources and the potential to be one of the leading producers in the world's agrifood industry supporting the growing population of the future, but if the present Government persists in ignoring the requirements of an industry that needs to be developed and expanded, we will eventually become a country totally dependent on the rest of the world for its food. The Government must immediately begin a recovery program which will not only benefit our farmers but will benefit all Canadians, and will restore economic growth and productivity.

Revitalizing the agrifood industry must be one of the Government's top priorities, and I suggest that the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Whelan) starts today—not tomorrow, not next week or next year, as he has so often stated in the past—to introduce legislation that will give farmers the assistance they so desperately need.

The concerns of the farming community are shared by the average Canadian. They are concerned about a spiralling rate of unemployment that is at an all time high since the great Depression. This figure does not even take into account those persons who have given up hope of finding employment, those who have succumbed to the pressures, stresses and frustrations