

The Address—Mr. Foster

for the hard pressed grain industry. He talked about negotiating funding with Premier Grant Devine of Saskatchewan. I hope this is not a total election ploy by talking about it in the House of Commons knowing that the topic will be carried into the hustings in Saskatchewan. Will it be negotiations on and on and on after the election nothing happens?

It seems to me that the Prime Minister suffers from incredible lack of credibility. The vast majority of people simply do not believe him. If he really wants to be believed, he should have come out full and fair and proposed so many new dollars, stated whether the money is a loan or a grant, and said exactly what assistance is available from the federal Government. We know that he cannot commit the provincial Governments, but he can say what his Government is willing to put forward in the face of this tremendous crisis facing western Canada. We are very concerned with whether the Prime Minister is just eyewashing or giving us another smoke and mirrors show.

If we look back to the Government's performance up to 1986, the average Canadian, not a farmer, listening to the news and reading headlines would have understood that the Government had provided some \$730 million in the February Budget. The average Canadian would have known a little later that the Prime Minister called a hurried press conference at the end of April and that another \$350 million had been allotted to the hard pressed agricultural industry. But if you look behind those announcements, you will find that either there is nothing there or that the actual commitment by the Government is very small. I just hope that the kind of announcement the Prime Minister made today, the right to negotiate funding, is not as phoney as those in the Budget and in his press conference of April 30. If we look back at the Budget announcement of \$730 million, there was no new money. It is just existing farm credit loans with some interest assistance to be provided under certain circumstances, but in the long run the farmer will get no subsidization of interest. Even in the short run, the total cost to the Government is in the order of \$50 million or \$65 million. That is the kind of *canard* that we worry about with the Prime Minister. We know that the Prime Minister's minions in the PMO know how to draft beautiful press releases which sound as if the farmers were getting something, but when you check into them you find that there is very little assistance there, if any.

I draw the attention of the House to the announcement of April 30 when the Prime Minister seemed to be giving several hundred millions of dollars to farmers when he announced that he was changing the range of the domestic price of wheat. He was not changing the domestic price of wheat, which would have provided additional funding by the consumers of Canada to farmers. He was changing the range. He made a big thing of it. It was going to involve several hundred millions of dollars. He did not actually change the domestic price of wheat. That money never went to the farmer.

The Prime Minister also announced at that time that he was going to remove the excise tax on farm fuel by 2 cents a litre.

He actually said 5 cents a litre, but 3 cents had already been given. If you look closely you will find that a year ago now the Government put 2 cents a litre on gasoline effective September 1, 1985. That levy was kept on during the full harvest and during the spring when farmers had to fill their fuel tanks. Dramatically, the Prime Minister removed it around June 1. But during that period, September to June, he probably extracted \$50 million or \$60 million. What he should have done was not only take it off but take it off retroactively to September 1 and apologize for imposing it because the farmers could not afford that cost.

The third peg in the Prime Minister's announcement of April 30 was to freeze freight rates. That would save Canadian farmers \$42 million. We checked that out with the senior grain transportation agency. We were told by its representatives that that was not freezing freight rates, just recalculating the volumes of grain to be shipped. Instead of shipping 32 million tonnes, only 28.5 million tonnes will be shipped, so no increase is necessary. This is the kind of phoney baloney we get from Mulroney which drives the agricultural sector wild. It drives the agriculture sector wild because not only does it get no benefit from it, the perception is left with Canadians that the Government actually did something. However, no actual cash ever comes to the farmer.

• (1530)

I just hope that there is some substance to the dramatic announcement made by the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) that he will get together with Grant Devine to provide some kind of funding to assist farmers who are in the most difficult financial position they have been in since the 1930s. It is simply not fair to the farmers to fool the rest of the country into believing that the farmers have been provided with some assistance when in fact they have not been at all.

I want to share with you, Mr. Speaker, an interesting experience I had this fall. I had the opportunity to visit Alberta after the Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. Mazankowski) had just spoken to a farm group there. The Deputy Prime Minister and I, as were you, were elected in the famous Class of 1968, and we are all good friends at a personal level. One of the farmers at this meeting said to me: "You know, I went there and listened to Don and he told me how much they had done for us and how great everything was and how we should all be happy, and all I could ask myself was, you know, if they have done so much and everything is so great, why do I feel so bad?" I think that is what many western farmers feel as they face perhaps the most uncertain future they have faced in many years.

We know that the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Wise) announced a \$46-million program with the Department of Employment and Immigration designed to take farmers off the farm. He announced that there would be 9,000 farmers leaving the farm.

The Government has done very little to cope with the farm debt crisis. As I described it a few moments ago, the farm commodity based mortgage will cost the Government very