

Adjournment Debate

Since the federal government is determined to go ahead with the small farm development plan and have signed over half of the provinces, I think they should perhaps take a different point of view for a province like Saskatchewan. The provinces of Saskatchewan and Manitoba are opposed to the plan as it now stands because they feel quite sincerely, as I and many others do, that it is not going to aid and assist farmers to stay on the land, or young farmers to get started. Rather, it is going to speed up the demise of the small farm all across the Prairies. It is going to take three farms to make two, and two farms to make one, and farms taken from older farmers will be sold to those who can afford to buy them.

I feel that the efforts and energies of the federal Department of Agriculture should be directed to aiding and assisting provincial programs. The provincial land bank will also be purchasing land from farmers, but in contrast to the small farm development plan will be channelling that land into the hands of younger farmers who want to start out, or into the hands of small farmers who need more land in order to make viable farming units. The only major difference between the two plans, as I understand it, in negotiations between the two departments is that the small farm development plan is strictly a development agency whereas the land bank plan in Saskatchewan is a Crown authority. It leases land to the farmer for five years when he is starting out and he has the option to purchase the land at an interest rate of 5 per cent. Because of the option to purchase clause, land is available to those without much capital, to young people starting out and to small farmers who need more land to make their operations viable.

I urge that the government and the Minister of Agriculture take into account the points of view of the Saskatchewan government and look at the merits of the provincial land bank scheme. I think they will come to the conclusion that they should be helping farmers by funds and by organization. There are two or three benefits. First, there would be more funds which could be borrowed in a more efficient manner. Second, there would not be any duplication of service and a greater amount of expertise would be available to the provincial land bank personnel. Finally, a provincial land bank program as presently constituted would be more localized than it would be if run federally. Governments in this country must move in the direction of more local autonomy. We must localize government administration and make people feel they are closer to the decision makers rather than farther away.

I hope the government will take these three points into consideration. The entire question of the transfer of farmland on the Prairies as well as across the country is important. The number of farms in this country is decreasing rapidly. According to the census, between 1965 and 1971 the number of farm units in this country fell by 15 per cent. The populations of our small rural towns and cities and other rural areas are diminishing instead of growing. If we are to keep Canada alive and flourishing, our farming community must be viable. One way of doing this is by helping farmers with schemes such as the land bank scheme of Saskatchewan. The federal government must be flexible in this area. It must begin listening to the provinces and regions if it is to keep this nation together as a viable country in the years to come.

[Mr. Nystrom.]

[Translation]

Mr. Léopold Corriveau (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Agriculture): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for Yorkton-Melville (Mr. Nystrom) expressed his concern about the young people who want to settle on the farm, and about federal help to the Saskatchewan land bank program.

I share his concern for the young people who would like to make a career of farming and earn a living from it.

As the hon. member doubtless knows, the federal small farms development program is now in force in several provinces, including Alberta, Ontario, British Columbia, Prince Edward Island, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia. It is of considerable help to the young farmers.

I trust that, in spite of difficulties, an agreement can be worked out with Saskatchewan so that the two programs might complement each other.

Negotiations are underway with Saskatchewan, and I hope that a quick agreement can be reached, in order that the young people of Saskatchewan may benefit from the same advantages of the small farms development programme as their friends from the other provinces.

[English]

PUBLIC WORKS—ALLEGED DISPOSAL OF OLD BARGES
BY DEPARTMENT IN LAKE OKANAGAN—STEPS TO
REMOVE

Mr. G. H. Whittaker (Okanagan Boundary): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of the Environment (Mr. Davis) in the House the other evening made the statement that it pays to be clean. This prompted me to ask the minister during the question period whether it is government policy with regard to the environment to bury old barges and other refuse in beautiful Okanagan Lake. Mr. Speaker ruled this question out of order on the basis that it was not urgent. But because of the urgency that was contained in this question, which Mr. Speaker did not understand, the question was rephrased the following day to point out the immediate hazard to navigation and safety caused by the attempted disposal by sinking of these barges.

Three old barges had been floating in Okanagan Lake and the Kelowna and District Safety Council, deeming them a hazard to navigation, asked the Department of Transport to take them out of the lake a few years ago. They were towed to a shallow part of the lake and beached, where they were left for some years. This still did not satisfy the safety council, as in their opinion the barges were still a hazard to navigation in the lake. They therefore kept pressing the Department of Transport to have them removed from the lake.

These barges were derelict in nature and their ownership was questionable. One was 170 feet by 50 feet, another 60 feet by 30 feet and another 80 feet by 50 feet. The Department of Transport convinced the public works department to call for tenders for the removal of these barges from their resting place in the lake. It is understood that two tenders were received, one for removing them entirely from the lake and the other for towing them out into the lake and sinking them. On hearing about the sinking, the Kelowna safety council immediately raised objections as this would create some form of pollution in