

Government Orders

I think that today Canadians need to have a new appreciation of the priorities that should be put on food, and this goes right down to the producer, to grain handling and to the urban centres. We are all together in this. I cannot emphasize enough again, as we look to this bill, the importance of doing something that will move quickly to get the grain moving.

Mr. John Harvard (Winnipeg St. James): Madam Speaker, I want to put a few remarks on the record with respect to this legislation.

First of all, though, I would like to point out that I concur with some of the remarks made by the parliamentary secretary a few moments ago. When he talks about making food a priority I agree with him. I see food as part of our security. I think it is essential to the security of this country because if we cannot maintain a viable agricultural industry, if we cannot feed ourselves then we, as a nation, are not secure. I support the parliamentary secretary on that point.

When he talks about a better understanding or needing a better understanding between rural folk and city folk, or between the rural communities and the urban areas, again I concur in those remarks because when you come right down to it, we are all in this together. We all eat. We all need a strong agricultural community. We have to work together. There has to be a major element of co-operation.

• (1210)

When you witness the kind of development that has occurred at Thunder Bay, that is a strike of grain handlers, a strike that impedes the movement of grain, that creates difficulties, in effect it pits farmer against labour and that is unfortunate. There is no reason in the world why farmers and blue collar workers have to be at each other's throats, that they have to be adversaries. I am idealistic enough to believe that they should always be on the same side of the ledger or the same side of the equation.

There is no doubt that a strike of the kind that is currently in place at Thunder Bay creates difficulties. We have got to remove that impediment as fast as possible and as much as possible not take away the very essential rights that belong to labour in this country.

There is one other point that I want to make. It relates to something that the parliamentary secretary mentioned just a few minutes ago. He was talking about the assistance required by farmers. He was mentioning the alleged Prime Minister's leadership on this question.

We are all aware of the plight of the farmers. We are all aware that they are getting \$2 or less than \$2 a bushel for their wheat. That is a starvation price. They need help and they need it very quickly. I am told that just minutes ago the Minister of Agriculture did announce some kind of aid package. I am not familiar with the details but I am hoping it is the kind of aid package that farmers will appreciate.

If there is an aid package that is welcomed by farmers, is it really because of the Prime Minister's leadership or is it because of the farmers in this country taking matters into their own hands? I think it is the latter. If we do have an assistance program announced today, I think most of the credit, if not all the credit, should go to the farmers in this country. They are the ones who held the rallies. They are the ones who held rallies in Miami and Brandon, Manitoba and in Rosetown and Weyburn, Saskatchewan and the granddaddy of them all, insofar as rallies are concerned, was held in my home city of Winnipeg yesterday. It is estimated that about 7,000 farmers gathered on the grounds of the Manitoba legislative building to make their case, to tell the world about their plight, about their financial situation. If there is some assistance announced today I think the credit should go to the farmers.

The government knew about this situation months ago. In a way the government's procrastination or the government's dithering really put the farmers through a terrible wringer. They have gone through hellish moments in the last few months. This is what they have had to do. They have had to hold rallies to tell this government to act.

I think it is unfortunate that they had to do that. I do not think it is in the nature of farmers to do what they have done in the past few weeks. I know it is not in their nature. Farmers in conversation can make their points and make them very strongly. It is not in their nature and not in their history really, although it has been done on occasion in the past to gather together in huge crowds and loudly protest. That is not the way they do it.