

Government Orders

Last November when I attended the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool annual meeting the president of that organization, Mr. Stevenson, put out a call for a \$500 million payment to Saskatchewan. We have been hearing that for months. At that time it was already becoming clear that in the coming crop year there was going to be not only very low income among farm communities and farmers, but no income at all.

Next year it is forecast that in Saskatchewan there will be a minus income of \$9.4 million. In fact there will not be anything to live on, there will not be anything with which to pay debts. There will be a minus income when it comes to income and expenses of \$9.4 million. This means that, on the average, farm families across Saskatchewan will have nothing to live on and nothing to pay for their labour with. Of course that spells very disastrous times, not only for those individual farmers but for their families and their communities.

In many communities one spouse or the other has to leave the community in the winter to look for work in the cities of Alberta and British Columbia because there is no work in Saskatchewan. The Conservative government of that province has seen to that. That creates all kinds of stresses and strains on the family because not only are they already in debt, many of them feel guilty that family farms which have been built up over the years are in danger of disappearing. Also, there is separation from families which adds crisis to farm family life.

What we have seen is this government withdrawing from agriculture support right through the course of its term of office. Not only have we seen actions which have restructured agriculture, for example, taking oats out from under the Wheat Board without consultation, we have seen the price of oats fall dramatically to the point where it is hardly worth growing. Farmers were never consulted on that. They have called repeatedly for a referendum but never got it.

We lost the two-price wheat system. I have checked the Estimates closely in this regard. We were assured in Prince Albert by the Premier of Saskatchewan that just because free trade meant two-price wheat was going—it was worth about \$800 million a year—we would certainly see that money returned to farmers directly. I have not seen anything in the Estimates since I have been here

which would reflect that kind of payment back to farmers.

We see a restructuring of agriculture in the agri-business model. We in Saskatchewan have always looked across the North Dakota border and have seen where that kind of approach has been taken. Rail lines have been consolidated. There are much larger elevators, and much larger farms. The population there has been disappearing from communities. You have towns without schools and very poor hospital services. What gradually happens is that not only does it become economically not viable to live in these rural communities, the lifestyle becomes so inadequate that families do not want to live there. The services are not there for their children and the whole rural way of life starts to crumble.

What do we need instead of this particular program? Certainly we need the \$500 million that the farm community has been calling for. Here, again we see one of these now you see it, now you don't kind of smoke and mirror shows. It is just like going to the fall fair and walking through the house of mirrors when it comes to the \$500 million or whatever the assistance payment will be. We heard the Minister of Agriculture earlier in the year say very categorically that there would be a payment in the hands of farmers before spring seeding. The time for spring seeding is getting closer and closer. People are already making their cropping decisions and certainly there is no money.

• (1250)

We have been pursuing that in the House. First, we heard that perhaps the money might be late in coming but nevertheless we would have a firm announcement very soon. There have been consultations going on continuously, allegedly. Surely, in this time of consultation with bankers, with ministers and with provincial officials there has been plenty of time to come up with a program. The need is surely there. Still we have not seen an announcement.

I would like to take this opportunity to call on the government to make an announcement on that payment because it is absolutely critical so that farmers can get on with their seeding plans.

As well, we have to start looking at the whole question of restructuring the farm debt. It has always struck me as absurd that we structure our farm debt in this country so