

Supply

I would just like to read a little statement from the *Winnipeg Free Press* dated February 19. This is the agricultural writer and he states: "Hello, Mississippi River. Goodbye, Thunder Bay." This is not a farmer saying this.

The famous American waterway may become the new route for shipping Manitoba grain when Ottawa tackles the grain transportation subsidy policy later this year.

Canadian Wheat Board studies already show that if the influence of Canadian grain transportation subsidies is removed, it's cheaper to ship grain down the Mississippi than through the St. Lawrence Seaway.

Selkirk farmer Rask Klagenberg says farmers will insist on access to the American river.

• (1350)

The House can see that this is not just what farmers are saying; this is something other people are reporting on, and it is a matter of fact. We have to address it.

One thing that really amazes me is why farm organizations have not pointed these issues out so we can address them before we get into such a predicament. I just happened to get a report from Manitoba Pool Elevators or Prairie Pools Inc. This is what they say in their brief: "In 1993 the property taxes paid by terminal elevator owners at the port of Vancouver were on an average five to six times higher than for similar sized terminals in the U.S. port of Seattle". That seems very high already and it seems disastrous as far as grain farmers are concerned.

Now listen to what they say about Thunder Bay: "Property taxes paid by terminal owners at Thunder Bay were more than 25 times higher than property taxes paid for similar sized terminals at the U.S. port of Duluth". How can we be competitive with those types of exorbitant taxes and over-pricing?

They go on further in their report to say: "Canada's two railways pay more than \$640 million annually in fuel, sales and property taxes, while the U.S. rail system receives tax incentives to maintain rail services".

Those are some of problems we in the grain industry are fighting with. I hope we can resolve them and that we can keep the jobs in Canada before they are exported to the U.S., which we have seen with a lot of other industries.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Guy Chrétien (Frontenac, BQ): Mr. Speaker, as the Reform member just pointed out, there are two solitudes in Canada. Farmers in his part of the country feel that they are treated unfairly, and so do farmers in Quebec, particularly dairy producers. It is my duty to remind this House of some very eloquent figures regarding federal spending in the agricultural sector.

I randomly selected two years. In 1980, the federal government spent 55 per cent of its budget for agriculture in western Canada, compared to 16.4 per cent in Quebec—I mention the

decimal because it is significant, considering that the total percentage is a mere 16 per cent. In 1993, the federal spent 60 per cent in western Canada, compared to 12.4 per cent in Quebec. So, we have 55 and 60 per cent for western provinces, compared to 16.4 and 12.4 per cent for Quebec.

Yet, Quebec generates 17 per cent of Canada's revenues in the agricultural sector. As you know, Quebecers account for 24 per cent of Canada's population. Let us look at a specific agricultural industry, such as potato growing. In terms of cultivated acreage, from 1981 to 1991, there was a 30 per cent increase in the West, compared to a 2 per cent decrease in Quebec. In the case of cattle, the production rose by 4 per cent in the West, while dropping by 13 per cent in the East.

As for hogs, there was a 39 per cent increase in the West and a 16-per-cent reduction in Quebec. Finally, the sheep population increased by 33 per cent in the West, compared to 8 per cent in Quebec. It is the same for every industry. This is what we mean when we say that this western diversification is done with our taxes.

• (1355)

Quebecers will actually pay to face unfair competition. This is what we are denouncing today. And I can tell Reform and Liberal members that every time Quebecers will be treated unfairly, the Bloc will raise its voice loud and clear.

[English]

Mr. Hoepfner: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate those remarks, and they are probably very accurate.

I am very concerned that we do not have an environmental catastrophe in Quebec. Because of all the tears that I have seen being shed in Quebec lately, their fresh drinking water might turn into salt water. What are we going to do then? I would hate to see that.

I agree with some of these comments. I would also like to point out that when we look at the total budget of agriculture, which is around 2 per cent, or perhaps even less, of the whole budget, agriculture at least brings back 8 per cent of the gross national product. We provide 15 per cent of the jobs in agriculture. It is a very important sector that we have probably been neglecting, whether it is Quebec or western Canada. I would sure appreciate the Bloc's help rather than criticism in trying to rectify this.

I still maintain that a country is only as strong as its agriculture. The sooner we learn to stand on our feet to take the problems and solve them together, and not through divisiveness, we will have a better country to live in, whether it is Quebec or western Canada. That is what I would really like to stress.

Mr. Len Taylor (The Battlefords—Meadow Lake, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the member who just spoke.