

Interim Supply

One of the many reasons why this session has been prolonged is the fact that the government has not had a clear-cut program of public business ready to deal with the crisis but has gone on piece by piece, bit by bit, introducing one small measure after another and sometimes following the course of filibustering its own legislation.

Mr. Churchill: You have been away too much.

Mr. Argue: The house leader says I have been away too much, and this from a spokesman of a cabinet the members of which have been away most of the time. The Minister of Agriculture is so seldom here that when we have questions to ask him we have to ask them of someone else.

An hon. Member: He is selling wheat.

Mr. Argue: The attendance of the opposition has been excellent this session—

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Argue:—and we have been giving a good account of ourselves. We are adjourning this session at a time when western Canada faces a drought, a national disaster. The government has no policy, no program, has announced nothing of an adequate nature to meet the very serious income deficiencies that are bound to affect the prairie provinces.

Mr. Brunsdon: I rise on a point of order, Mr. Chairman. The hon. member says we have no program. The government has a very excellent program which has been acclaimed in western Canada. If the hon. member would take his seat while I am speaking—

The Acting Chairman (Mr. McCleave): The hon. member has not raised a point of order, but rather a point of debate. The hon. member for Assiniboia.

Mr. Argue: This is another phony point of order from a member of this house who probably should be more concerned about doing something because the widespread crop failure will probably be greater in the constituency he represents than in any other. His constituency is likely to have a total crop failure even if rain should come within the next few hours. What does he do this afternoon? He gets up and makes claims that are not in accord with the facts, so far as I am aware, and which I am certain will not have the agreement of his constituents.

We need action by the government now to deal with this national disaster. The government may have its allies in doing so little. The head of the Saskatchewan retail merchants' association said the other day, why all this talk of disaster? He said, farm income is no more than 30 per cent of the income

of Saskatchewan. A loss of 30 per cent of this income in Saskatchewan does constitute a disaster in the province and a disaster for Canada. If rain is not received in adequate quantities within the next few days—and I am glad to note there has been some rain in Manitoba and eastern Saskatchewan in the last few hours—this will be the greatest national disaster this country has seen since the end of the war and far greater by way of loss of income and total hardship although perhaps, for individuals, not as great as the Rimouski fire or hurricane Hazel or the Winnipeg flood.

This great national disaster facing the people of the three prairie provinces demands substantial action at this time. The government has announced it will pay part of the cost of moving feed grain. It has announced it will co-operate in the maintenance of the supplies of coarse grains that are now in the prairies. This is only a small part of the action which should be taken now. The government should be prepared to pay the full freight costs on cattle if it is necessary to move them long distances to pasture. I would suggest that the government should establish, not these national average support prices with deficiency payments that are such a hoax and which have meant so little in the last few years. The Prime Minister laughs. He can ask the egg producers how much they like these insignificant prices they received when egg prices have been so low. He can ask the hog producers if they have received anything from this program.

Mr. Harkness: The hog producers have been very happy these last few months.

Mr. Argue: We may soon find that out. Some of them have been happy with some of the marketings because this policy has been liquidating production. This is the only answer the government has to agricultural production. I suggest to the government that instead of using this deficiency average price—this is the kind of verbiage this government is good at putting into legislation—they should establish a floor price on cattle and hogs below which these prices are not allowed to go. The government should put in some floors, put in some guarantees and base these prices on a fair return to the farmer plus his cost of production.

I suggest further that there should be an income payment to farmers now, in addition to prairie farm assistance. In addition, if we are going to get this \$1 an acre again that is always kept dangling, there should be a payment of \$5 an acre from the national treasury where there is a total crop failure. The government always waits so long to make any announcement about this \$1 per acre.