

Government Orders

Mr. Jordan: Mr. Speaker, I am not sure if the member is trying to run out the clock, but it took him a long time to tell us that he obviously does not understand the amendment. The amendment wants to delay changing the present legislation, withhold the amendments, because the farmer is just now harvesting his crop. He started out his year at seed time with the expectations, I suspect, that he would have access to this interest free money. If this legislation goes through without amendment at this time, he will no longer have this access to industry money. We are saying at this side of the House, delay that until at least we get through this harvest year, the crops are sold and the money is made available and then put it up again for discussion.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: On debate, the hon. member for Skeena.

Mr. Jim Fulton (Skeena): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have an opportunity to speak on Bill C-36, and perhaps to educate the Minister of National Defence a little bit about the grain industry. One would have thought that someone from the Prairies would know something about the grain industry, but I suppose because I have one of the largest and most efficient grain elevators in the world in Prince Rupert, I have had an opportunity to learn a little more about grain than the minister has.

I might as well leap right off the top, Mr. Speaker, with what was quoted from *The Western Producer*. My friend from Prince Albert—Churchill River made note of it yesterday but certainly what the Conservative delegates, many of them farmers, had to say at the recent meetings on the Prairies are worth repeating here because the minister does not seem to understand what the implications are of wiping out the assistance that has been provided under the existing legislation through the government picking up interest costs and why that has added, not taken away, from orderly marketing of grains and crops.

This headline not only caught my colleague's eye, but it certainly caught mine because it said: "Rural PCs line up at convention to air their gripes". It goes on to say:

Conservative farm policies were attacked last week by rural delegates attending the Progressive Conservative national convention.

They said despite official government optimism and self-congratulations, conditions are bad down on the farm. And government policy is driving rural voters away from Conservatives, they warned.

There was scarcely a word of praise for past government performance or the new theology of market-oriented, subsidy-reduced farm policy being developed and promoted by agriculture minister Don Mazankowski.

As Mazankowski sat in the audience listening, delegate after delegate came to the microphone to complain about the state of the farm economy.

They complained about prices, high interest rates, uncertainty caused by government policy and the inequities of the drought program.

Russell Lakusta, of Wandering River in northeastern Alberta, complained that he cannot afford to turn his grain farm over to his son.

"Farmers are in very poor shape", he said. "If we don't get federal help, lower interest rates and get to the point where farmers break even—" At that point, his voice broke and the sentence trailed off.

Later the longtime Conservative said he does not find the government particularly sympathetic to the farmer's plight, despite the record of subsidies.

"I still think the government is sorry for the \$3 billion they gave to us," he said in an interview. "I don't know why. I think if it hadn't been for Grant Devine's election, we wouldn't have gotten that either."

Farmer Bill Cole, from Ninette, Man., was equally blunt.

He was angry about the loss of the interest-free advance payment program this year and the way the drought payment was handled. Payments were late, administration too cumbersome and in too many cases, farmers are being asked to pay back thousands of dollars already received in interim payments, he said in an interview.

On his own farm, Cole received a \$7 an acre interim payment and then, instead of the additional payment he expected to cover his bills, he received a notice from Ottawa that he had been overpaid by 52 cents an acre. He has to pay it back.

He went on to say:

"That program was a disaster", said Cole, a member of the executive—

The Conservative executive, Mr. Speaker—

—in grains minister Charlie Mayer's constituency organization.

Here is what he had to say:

"I told Charlie last week to his face, you have two chances for re-election: slim and none."

Other delegates had other complaints.

A young Quebec farmer said the government should do more to help young people stay on the land.