

Wheat Export Prices

Unfortunately the Minister of Agriculture is no longer in his seat. He was here for only a short time this evening, as was pointed out by another hon. member. If the minister is not prepared to consider acreage payments and other proposals put forward, what proposals has he for alleviating the situation that exists in western Canada? If he rejects this form of payment, surely he should come up with some other means of providing a cash injection into the western Canadian economy.

The two major farm organizations, the Canadian Federation of Agriculture and the National Farmers' Union made clear in their presentations to the government this spring that while they might favour one particular means of cash payment over another, in fact they thought the major problem was to provide a direct infusion of cash into the western Canadian agricultural economy. The government has apparently failed to take this into account or give it any serious or adequate consideration.

The Minister of Agriculture went on to point out the advantages and benefits accruing from the cash advance program. Of course, the cash advance program was approved by all of us in the house. It has made a contribution to the welfare of the agricultural community and has in fact given farmers an advance on the production which they are unable to market immediately because of problems with which we are all familiar. This is why the cash advance program was advocated some 15 or 16 years ago; it is why it was introduced some ten or eleven years ago. It has played a very useful role in the western Canadian economy. But surely, Mr. Speaker, the government must by now have received the message that something more than this program is required. It must by now realize it is not enough.

The Minister of Agriculture also referred to two steps taken during the past year with respect to the cash advance program. I do not blame him for attempting to take the credit for these steps. However, when the minister and the government overplay this measure and say it is the solution, it will provide great benefits, and trumpet the \$250 million figure about and say this is what the government is doing for the farmers of western Canada, I suggest it is the type of statement which produces the kind of reaction and frustration which in fact resulted in some irrational actions during the past week which the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) could tell us more about. This type of proposal simply will not

deal with the problem that exists at the present time.

I am very glad that the Minister of Agriculture has again resumed his seat. I place this on the record because I commented on his absence just a few minutes ago. Other hon. members might have done the same when they were referring to certain absences earlier in the evening.

The final clincher of the Minister of Agriculture was when he said that as of May 1, 75 per cent of the farmers owing money to the Farm Credit Corporation made their regular payments, and only 25 per cent, I take it, were in arrears. Is the minister seriously suggesting that this is an indication that everything is all right, namely, because one quarter of the farmers owing money to the Farm Credit Corporation were in arrears as of May 1? I know farmers in western Canada who were able to scrape up some of their last pennies to make their payment on May 1, and they have no idea where the next payment will come from or how they will meet it.

The minister then referred to the remaining 25 per cent who were in arrears and suggested that one half of them were already in arrears. I would not attempt to suggest the motive of the minister in making that statement. However, the effect of his statement was to cast a slur on all western Canadian farmers. His statement that roughly 12½ per cent, or one-eighth, of the farmers were already in arrears left the impression that those farmers were in effect a bad credit risk and were not meeting payments they should be able to meet. I suggest to the Minister of Agriculture, who seems to be fitting in and out of the house at the present time—

An hon. Member: He is back again.

Mr. Burton: The minister is again in his seat. I suggest to the minister that the fact 12½ per cent, or whatever is the exact figure, of our farmers were in arrears prior to April 30 last, was due to the already serious financial trouble they were experiencing. The fact that one-eighth of our farmers were in arrears as of April 30 is, I suggest, one indicator of the seriousness of the situation that is developing. Farmers in western Canada can see that the picture is getting worse, and it will get even worse. I suggest this is one reason why they are not swallowing the statements of ministers who suggest that the cash advance program is such a great thing and will solve the present situation. The government knows very well that you cannot