

Farm Credit Act

I believe that the small farm development plan would be termed, more correctly, the small farm elimination plan. All you have to do is look at some of the statistics to see what is happening to the small farms of this country. I believe it would be worth while putting some figures on the record. We find that between 1966 and 1971, according to the dominion census which was conducted last year, the number of farms in Canada decreased by 15 per cent, from 430,000 to 366,000. In Saskatchewan, the number of farms declined from 85,000 to 76,000, a drop of 10.2 per cent. This happened right across the country.

With regard to the maritime provinces, the province of Nova Scotia, for example, showed a decrease of 37 per cent. The number of farms in New Brunswick decreased by 37 per cent, and farms in Quebec decreased by 23.7 per cent between 1966 and 1971. This tells us loudly and clearly what is happening to agriculture right across Canada. The family farm is on its way out and the government is attempting to introduce the small farm consolidation plan through the back door. I say they will have a fight on their hands.

All of us in this party have expressed disappointment at the fact that the Minister of Finance (Mr. Turner) in his budget last night did not include one measly item for the farmers of this country, despite the number of farms having decreased by 15 per cent in the last five years. When I asked the Minister of Agriculture a question about this last week, he rose and in his arrogant and smug manner said, "We are looking after that. Farm income is up this year over last year and that will take care of the situation, so that farmers will not leave their farms as rapidly as heretofore".

I want to remind the minister and the government that in 1970 farm income dropped to an almost all-time low. In Saskatchewan, in 1970, the average net income per farmer was around \$1,000 a year. That is a serious situation and it is something the Minister of Agriculture and the Minister of Finance should take into account. This is one of a number of indicators which show we are having trouble in agriculture right across the country. To underline the point I am making, I should like to quote to the House the leading paragraph of the 1972 presentation to the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) and members of parliament by the Canadian Federation of Agriculture, which they made a short time ago. It reads:

We meet with you today following a year when the farmers realized income fell to a new, disastrous low—the lowest in dollar terms for as long as comparisons make any sense; in real terms to 73 per cent of what it was ten years previously.

May I remind hon. members that 1961 was also a very poor year in terms of the farmer's income. The presentation continues:

The forecast for 1972, which we sincerely hope events will disprove, signals a further decline. The cost-price squeeze has achieved a new, startling and damaging intensity.

I believe that what the Federation of Agriculture is saying is entirely true. The situation is not good in rural Canada. Farmers are being squeezed out, farm income is very low—and parliament and this government must do something about it immediately. I think there is a place for a rural society in Canada, a place for the farm, the town and the village. I mention the towns and villages

[Mr. Nystrom.]

because when you drive through Saskatchewan today you find that every town with the exception of one or two has declined in population since 1965 or 1966. This is due almost entirely to the depression of the agricultural industry, because when farmers are not making money—

Mr. Whelan: Oh, oh!

Mr. Nystrom: I realize when members from large urban centres, such as the hon. member for Essex (Mr. Whelan), speak they do not understand what I am saying. But perhaps he can be educated. He is a member from a large urban centre and I understand and sympathize with him.

To go back to the Prairies and to rural Canada, we find that farm income there has dropped rapidly. We find, also, that the small towns suffer, businessmen are closing their doors or laying off workers. People then have to move from the small town or village into the city. In essence, this contributes to the destruction of a life style which I think is very much part of the Canadian society: it is the fabric of our life from coast to coast. This is the kind of life that I want to protect. We in this parliament are entirely responsible for what has happened in western and in rural Canada during the last five or six years.

It is about time the government got off its bottom and did something about the situation in a positive and constructive way. They are putting very little into agriculture. Nothing went to agriculture in last night's budget. The Minister of Finance had the audacity to say that farmers will benefit because when they get old they will benefit from the pension increase, and farmers who have sons and daughters who attend university will benefit from the \$50 income tax allowance. The minister also said that we passed the grain stabilization plan. We passed no such plan. That shows how much he knows about agriculture, and I know the Assiniboia constituents will remind him of it.

We must do something about increasing the living standards of farmers and the prices they receive for their commodities. They receive less for a bushel of wheat now than they did in 1949. Look at the price of farm machinery which they have to purchase to produce a bushel of wheat! It has skyrocketed. Also the farmers have been victimized because of increases in the costs of production. What has the government done about this? The Barber Commission Report on farm machinery recommended a series of measures to help farmers and to bring down the costs of production. What has the government done with this report? Nothing. It has shelved the report, which is now gathering dust. I suggest to you, Mr. Speaker, that the government is more interested in farm machinery companies than in Canadian farmers. I also suggest to you that the Conservative party fits in the same bag as the government. Shake them up together, dump them out and they are both of the same cloth; it does not make any difference which it is.

• (2040)

We shall have to do some radical things in this country if we want to help the farmers. Reference has been made to the land bank project in Saskatchewan. I invite the hon. member for Lisgar to stop quoting the *Free Press Weekly*, which I suggest has not been a friend of the farmers. I