

I have discussed the seed grain situation with the Minister of Agriculture. He will certainly see to it that should there be a shortage steps will be taken to ensure that supplies are available.

The government has been attempting not only to assist farmers in difficult financial situations but to encourage the production of crops which are most suited to particular areas as a means of minimizing the size of losses which can occur. I am happy that notwithstanding certain criticisms, the gist of the hon. member's remarks has been to support the measures which have been taken.

• (1750)

Mr. Hamilton (Qu'Appelle-Moose Mountain): Mr. Chairman, I hardly thought when I returned to the House of Commons that my first speech would be on agriculture, but this seems to be my fate. I rise to say a few words to the absent Minister of Agriculture, not only to give him condolences for his job but to support him in what I suspect is his new, fresh attitude toward the marketing of grain in this country. When three weeks ago he asked the farmers of western Canada to grow all the grain they could, I was in western Canada and supported those remarks because they were the direct opposite of what we had been told for the previous four years.

Votes before the committee of \$8 million or \$9 million, money to help farmers in great distress, can only be understood by the rest of the country when we look at the whole situation in perspective. The perspective of the last four years has been of a government that is going the wrong way in the matter of marketing, that has been reducing the income of farmers to a level where they could not build up reserves with which to meet the emergencies that occur, whether they be in the Peace River area, eastern Ontario, the Maritimes or the eastern townships of Quebec. That was a deliberate decision made by the government of the day after three years of study, and it sent this country in the wrong direction.

Today this country stands condemned in the eyes of the hungry people of this world for not being able to do what it is elementary that we do here, namely, produce food for the world, something we can do so efficiently. By letting the income of our farmers decline to the point it reached in 1969 and 1970 we took away the farmers' ability to produce food and meet the demands of the world.

It is a matter of shame to every Canadian who ponders about this interdependent world in which we live that for the last four years Canada has been a net importer of beef at a time when the world is desperately short of protein. No government sitting in the seat of power during the last four years can escape that indictment. It is no help to the people around the world who need that protein to say that our American neighbours are also importing beef, because their government stands condemned for the same reason. The United States took land out of production and applied restrictions. That is why today the American farmers, indeed the American people, stand beside Canadians equal in guilt and equal in shame for not doing the basic things they should have done.

It is on the subject of grain that I want to speak most strongly. I shall praise the Minister of Agriculture so long as he keeps going in the direction he is going now, namely,

Supply

that of expanding production. When there is a hungry world, any minister or any government that votes for restricting the production of food in a country that can produce food as Canada can stands condemned not only before parliament but before the country and their own conscience. I want to make that very clear.

There has been a debate all over the western world this last 15 to 20 years about the future of agriculture. World economists have been looking at the traditional markets for certain products. To use wheat as an example, in our traditional bread-grain markets of Europe these economists see a declining per capita consumption of bread-grains, and since the population is not increasing quickly enough to take up the slack these economists say that we must advise our farmers in the bread growing areas of the world to reduce production.

They do not see in that model two billion people living in Asia, South America and Africa who would like access to any type of food whether traditional with them or not. They do not see in that model that China has now come into the market as a steady purchaser of bread-grains from western countries. They do not see in that model that they use that Russia, having spread its agricultural production across the Urals and into the volatile, dry land of that area, sporadically comes into the market to buy several hundred million bushels of grain. They do not see any of these new factors in that model. They do not see in the general picture that whereas ten years ago the average trade in wheat between the countries of the world was roughly one billion bushels a year, it is today over two billion bushels a year and is still rising. What was a surplus ten years ago is nothing at all today.

When so much was said in this House two years ago about surplus there was roughly a surplus of two and a half billion bushels of grain, insufficient for one year's marketing. No merchant can stay in business without having something on the shelves, but we took our inventory off the shelves. That is what I want to speak about, Mr. Chairman, putting it in very simple terms.

In addition to the advice given to us by economists, advice was also given to us by those who know the needs of people—nutritionists, demographers, sociologists. A conference was held here in Canada in June of 1969, the first and only conference of this kind held in Canada, attended by all the brains of the Ford Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation and the Food and Agriculture Organization, etc. At this conference representatives told of all they had done to bring about a green revolution around the world and confessed that even with all their efforts in the waters of the sea and on the dry land areas of the world, they would be unable to meet the needs of the people of the world. Therefore, they pleaded with governments to go all out to produce all the food they could. Figures were cited showing how they were losing the race.

The minister of agriculture in the previous government, the Hon. H. A. Olson, was given this information and he attended the November meeting in Rome of FAO. On November 11 he stood before the FAO nations and pledged Canada's all-out support for the expansion of production to help meet the deficiency in food production around the world. He made that pledge on our behalf.