

*Government Orders*

When I was speaking on the bill yesterday, I read into the parliamentary record a statement that was released a few days ago by the Canadian Federation of Agriculture, which is opposed to this bill and wants the cash advance system to continue, but with interest free cash payments. I want to complete the reading of the statement into the parliamentary record:

The Advance Payments for Crops Act serves to shift sales out of the immediate post harvest season thereby reducing the extent of export sales in autumn and shortage induced imports during later months. It also reduces downward price pressure in the domestic market in the immediate post harvest season.

This is a well known agricultural organization and it should be listened to.

Another important farm group that is opposed to this bill is the National Farmers Union. The NFU, in a statement the other day, said this, and again I quote:

The Prairie Grain Advance Payments Program has for thirty years relieved grain producers from prolonged financial pressures in circumstances where poor delivery opportunities prevailed.

The fact that the advances were interest free was, of course, the most attractive feature of the program. It enabled producers to save on interest costs by meeting debt obligations to creditors earlier than might otherwise be the case.

That is another important farm organization that is opposed to this government initiative.

Ordinary farmers have become involved in this debate. In fact, just yesterday my colleague from Lambton—Middlesex received a long distance phone call from a farmer in Weyburn, Saskatchewan, who was deeply concerned about the withdrawal of cash payments on an interest free basis. It shows how concerned farmers are that they will make long distance phone calls to MPs here in the nation's capital.

Other politicians in other provinces, of course, are concerned about this government move as well. In fact, the agriculture minister in my home province of Manitoba, the Hon. Mr. Findlay, issued a statement the other day expressing concern about this bill. Let me quote one paragraph from his statement. Of course, we must remind the country that the agriculture minister in the province of Manitoba is a Progressive Conservative so he shares the party of members opposite. He said, relating to this bill:

As farmers requirements for cash advances are most critical during the first half of the crop year, I am requesting that Mr. Mazankowski give serious consideration to cash advances being interest free until January 31 of each year.

Those are some of the core arguments against this bill which is ill advised and should be withdrawn so that the government can enter into consultations with farm groups right across the country and get some advice on how it should proceed. What the farmers are saying, loud and clear, is that they want the cash advances to continue interest free.

Yesterday, when I was speaking on this bill, I said that I had been talking to a farmer friend and he could not understand what was in the government's mind, what was on its agenda. He found the government's performance very curious and confusing. He asked what this initiative is all about, whether it is part of a larger philosophy, part of some over-all program. That question was partly answered by the Deputy Prime Minister yesterday who said that this measure is an effort on the part of government to have Canadian farmers make their contribution to deficit reduction.

• (1540)

I really find that insulting. Farmers in this country do not need to be told what they have to do. I find that kind of statement condescending and insulting. Farmers have been asked over and over again to do their share. If there is any group of people in this country who do their fair share, it is the farmers. It seems that this government is bent on shutting down rural Canada. It is not just this bill that concerns me and the people of Canada, particularly farmers. There is a whole host of things going on in rural Canada. For example, there is the closing of post offices. It seems that almost every other week there is a post office somewhere in this country that is closed. Then, of course, there is VIA Rail. Today we got the announcement that 51 per cent of it is going to be shut down. I think most Canadians believe that if VIA Rail is cut in half, that will be the end of it. Pretty soon there will not be any more VIA Rail.

Continuing along with this program of shutting down rural Canada by the government, we saw as a result of the budget this spring the government wanting to close a number of military bases that are important to rural Canada, bases like Portage la Prairie in my province, Port Hardy in British Columbia and Summerside in Prince Edward Island.