

Supply—Agriculture

conditions which made it absolutely impossible for him to pay, then the governments and the railways shared the cost of shipping that grain in. In other words, as I remember it, the railway reduced their rate down to fifty per cent of the actual cost, the province took twenty-five per cent of the cost, and the Dominion took twenty-five per cent. Some arrangement similar to that was made down until the time when prairie farm assistance was brought in. Since then the federal government has taken the position that, by taking care of relief problems in areas where there have been crop failures, our share of the responsibility has been fairly well taken care of by the payments that we make in connection with prairie farm assistance. During these last few years they have totalled sums ranging up to \$14 million, \$15 million, and \$16 million; and this year, I understand, they will amount to a sum about equal to the highest of those figures I mentioned. That being the case, we have not considered that there was any problem in the west that necessitated our taking any direct action in connection with the matter of freight.

Last week Mr. Nollet, the minister of agriculture in Saskatchewan, was in Ottawa. Prior to that, just a few days before he came, he had written to me making representations somewhat similar to those that have just been made by the hon. member for Lake Centre, indicating that resolutions to that effect had been passed by some farm organizations in the areas where the drought had taken place, and suggesting that freight ought to be paid. No request has been made by Mr. Nollet that we should pay all the freight. He has suggested that probably we ought to give some assistance toward the payment of the freight.

On the other question of maintaining the grain in the area, that has always been taken care of by direct request of the provincial governments to the wheat board, and the wheat board and the provincial governments working in co-operation have arranged that trains which are necessary in order to maintain livestock in any given area, provided that the grain is there, is retained in that area sufficiently long to permit all farmers to go to the elevators for the grain in them, or to go to a neighbouring farmer, get the grain, and take it to their farms. As I say, a certain length of time is given, sometimes two months, sometimes three months in advance, and it is indicated that no grain will be shipped out of the elevators in those areas during that period. The farmers are notified that they should go there within that period and get their grain. That of course avoids, to the extent that grain is available, the necessity of having any freight whatsoever paid on grain that is being moved about.

Mr. Diefenbaker: Has that been done this year?

Mr. Gardiner: I imagine so. It is not our responsibility to do it. Every time that the provinces have asked us to have it done it has been done, and I would assume that the provincial government has undertaken its responsibility in that respect. There is no reason why it should not, and if they have there is not any doubt that it is being done. If it has not been done, then I am quite sure that the discussion which has been raised here tonight, if it is reported tomorrow, will bring about action which will see that it is done. From the discussion I had with Mr. Nollet last week I was under the impression that that kind of thing had been done—at least he did not suggest to me that there was anything further for us to do about it in order to see that it was done. Therefore I presume it has been done. The only question that he had in his mind was as to whether we did not think we had some obligation in the matter of paying freight, and he based it on the fact that we were paying freight on grain going east and west. I explained to him, as I have explained to the committee, that we did not think there was any connection between the two things, and therefore no responsibility passed on that line. I also referred to the arrangement which had always been made by the railways, and he explained to me that that seemed to be impossible at the present time. The railways do not acknowledge that there is any way in which they can deal with the situation. In addition to that, they have also denied the farmers the special rates which they had been allowing on seed grain. On the railways in years gone by there was a very special rate, a low rate, on grain which was being shipped from one place to another in order to provide seed. It was based on the idea, the better the seed the more tonnage the railways would have to ship; but this year for some reason or other—I presume it is associated with the investigations which have been made into freight rates—the railways have cut out all the special rates. They have cut out the special rates on taking livestock to fairs. Everything of that nature has been struck out. Therefore the farmers are having a little more difficulty in getting arrangements made. It is on that ground that Mr. Nollet suggested that probably the federal government ought to do something. I have asked him to write to me, giving me a detailed statement of the position that they find themselves in. I have suggested to him that after I receive that detailed statement I shall be quite prepared to place the matter before the government; and, when I do receive it, it will be placed before the government.