

The Address—Mr. Baldwin

are many thousands of people who have suffered and are suffering great hardship at this time. The provincial government made a careful study and analysis of the situation. Shortly after the first week in December the province of Alberta made a request of the federal government, which I assume was directed to the Minister of Agriculture. This request set out in detail the terms of a plan of assistance in which the provincial government asked the federal government to share on a 50-50 basis. The Minister of Agriculture, both during the course of discussion with the provincial minister and in a letter to me, rejected the proposal of the provincial government. He based his rejection on the fact that eligible farmers have received or are receiving P.F.A.A. assistance, and the validity of superimposing further federal assistance on these areas could be questioned.

I suggest, Mr. Speaker, that the minister has completely misconceived the purpose and nature of the Prairie Farm Assistance Act. The application of this legislation, as designed in 1939, was limited to the southern area of the prairie provinces, and originally was only for the purpose of providing help against drought. Since then the application of the act has been extended in scope and area so that it now covers all western Canada and the Peace River bloc in British Columbia. It is, Mr. Speaker, a form of statutory insurance. There are people not only in my part of the country but in all parts of western Canada who have made annual contributions to this scheme, which can be termed an insurance premium. The contribution is 1 per cent of the value of the grain which they sell. These people have paid this 1 per cent for 10, 15 or 20 years and never once received a dollar in prairie farm assistance aid.

This 1 per cent is a premium paid by farmers, and it is like any other insurance premium. It is a gamble. The government gambles and the farmer gambles. If there is that degree of adverse weather conditions which results in the crop being below the minimum required under the act, the farmer is then entitled to an inspection and to receive an amount provided in the regulations. This is a statutory form of insurance. I suggest that the minister, in his rejection, has completely misunderstood this particular basis of payment.

As a matter of fact the minister has pointed out, I think quite properly, that over the last three years the entire Peace River country had received a considerable amount

through the provisions of this legislation. The minister supplied figures in answer to a question I asked, but I suggest to the minister this money was not necessarily paid to the same people who are now seeking relief. This money, I judge, was distributed over the entire Peace River area, including the Peace River bloc of British Columbia. If you divide the total amount by the number of farm units, the result would be approximately \$540 per unit over three years or approximately \$180 per year.

I point out to the minister that I admire the position he took when he was out west with regard to the railways and the effect of their actions on western Canada. I point out to the minister also that a series of horizontal freight rate increases has placed a burden on the people of western Canada and an additional burden on the people of northern Alberta who are on the receiving end of these increases, all of which are reflected in the cost of living. I can confirm this fact from my own experience since I have lived here as well as in the Peace River district. I can confirm the fact that this \$180 per year will no more than cover the increased cost of living which the people of the north have to pay by reason of these horizontal freight rate increases. I do not believe there is any question about it, and statistics will bear me out, Mr. Speaker.

Last year I thought the minister took a very reasonable and very tolerant attitude toward this question of assistance to farmers. At the time the subject was debated the hon. member for Renfrew South, as he then was, participated in order to tell the story of his own people. He said, as reported on page 10207 of *Hansard* for November 17, 1964:

I would point out that I appreciate there is a constitutional difficulty in these matters; that unfortunately national legislation pertaining to crises in various provinces where, through no fault of their own the farmers of this country are very hard hit by drought or other disasters of this nature which stem from an act of God, is possibly lacking in this parliament by reason of the fact that to date no national policy has been evolved—

Later he said:

However, Mr. Speaker, I do submit that in a situation such as this, which affects not only the economic well-being of these farmers but even involves the possibility of the wells being dry and the water tables being extremely low, and which might affect the question of health and welfare in these areas, surely when a crisis of this kind occurs some action can be taken under the federal powers to remedy it.

At that time the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture replied. He