

Alleged Failure to Aid Western Farmers

Union have made this clear. Considered estimates of the immediate need range in the area of \$150 million to \$200 million. Various proposals have been put forward as to how payment might be made. I have already mentioned the proposal made by my colleague, the hon. member for Saskatoon-Biggar (Mr. Gleave), for a supplementary payment of 20 cents per bushel based on 1967-68 deliveries.

Failure on the part of the government to act now and to develop an adequate program for dealing with the situation will result in disaster for many thousands of farmers and will set back the prairie economy, together with the economy of Canada, in a way that it will take years to recover. Tinkering with gimmicks or small programs will be of no help. A major program is essential. The agriculture committee of the House of Commons recognized the problem after its western tour. Among its recommendations is the following:

Your committee further recommends to the government the advisability of measures for alleviating the critical cash position of farmers in the predominantly grain growing areas of western Canada.

I don't know what further recommendations are needed to get the government to move. As a result of representations made to the government by farm organizations, by members of this house and by others, I gather the government is now looking at some possibilities. The Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Olson) has let it be known that he is considering a number of proposals. It was suggested to me that he has become the minister of "might be". Possibly he might find a role in a production of "Alice in Wonderland."

The minister said there might be a two price system. There might be some hope for this proposal because it will not cost the government anything. He said there might be some sort of price guarantee. It appears that there is little prospect for this proposal.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I am sorry to interrupt the hon. member but his time has expired.

Mr. Burton: Mr. Speaker, I just need a minute or two to finish.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Does the hon. member have the unanimous consent of the house to continue.

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

Mr. Burton: I wish to thank the house for its courtesy.

[Mr. Burton.]

The minister said there might be some help for farmers who could not deliver a five bushel quota—big deal! This will only allow a farmer to go broke at a little slower rate. One thing is clear; the government is delaying any announcements until it considers they will be too late to give any assistance on 1967-68 crop deliveries. If this is the type of tinkering and fiddling the minister and the government are going to engage in, I suggest the Minister of Agriculture should resign and he can pick his reasons. If he is only going to recommend to his colleagues tinkering, fiddling proposals, then he has no understanding of the situation. If he has in fact recommended substantial programs to his colleagues and had them rejected, then I would suggest that any Minister of Agriculture with any self respect would resign from a government that takes such a callous attitude.

If the Liberal government continues with its present callous and stubborn attitude, it will go down in history as the government responsible for the final destruction of a viable agricultural industry which is vital to the welfare of the Canadian economy, and which is capable of making a significant contribution to the social and economic life of Canada.

Mr. Ross Whicher (Bruce): Mr. Speaker, as a member of the agriculture committee of the House of Commons who has had the opportunity in the last couple of months of travelling from the west right through to the east coast, I feel it is my obligation to say something here this afternoon about the agricultural situation as I see it in Canada and, more particularly, in the western part. The motion deals with the so-called plight of the agricultural industry in the Western provinces.

Let me say I feel somewhat guilty in that it seems we have discussed the wheat and grain problem here much more often than we have discussed the problems connected with some of the agriculture products grown in my own province of Ontario and in the eastern provinces. Before I carry on, I should like to impress upon the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Olson) that all is not right with other products in the agricultural world here in Canada. Much could be done and must be done if we are going to keep this great agricultural industry of ours viable in order that the farmers across the country can attain at least the standard of living that people in other parts of the economy enjoy.

As an example, in the past few months certain things have happened in respect of other parts of our agricultural industry.