

*Business of Supply*

peatedly to the efficiency of the present system, quoting pious platitudes. At least he appreciates that a problem does exist. His remarks—thank goodness—were at least an improvement over those of the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Olson) on the last two or three occasions when he spoke during a debate on agriculture. On those occasions all we could discern from the hon. gentleman's statements was that the farmers "never had it so good".

This afternoon the minister talked at length about long-term planning and policies yet to be formulated. In the long haul, long-range planning is, of course, important. We all realize that policies concerning marketing, pricing, storage, transportation, production and quality have to be reviewed. But what about plans for dealing with the present emergency? I would remind the House that at the present time wheat sales are the lowest for several years. Moreover, farmers are receiving the lowest prices in years, the lowest quotas in years and the lowest net income—if any at all—in years. At the same time, input costs are the highest in Canadian history. All this has resulted in more people than ever leaving or wishing to leave our farm communities. The total effect has been to place the agriculture industry in the most serious position it has occupied in our time. To add insult to injury, the minister tells us there will not even be a final wheat payment this spring. This is another indication of how bad things really are.

I ask the minister: What does the government intend to do to meet the cash crisis on western farms? If hon. gentlemen opposite have not already made up their minds, let me make a couple of suggestions. First, steps should be taken at once, not a week or a month from now, to move wheat into the space presently unoccupied at the Lakehead. I understand that 60 million bushels could be accommodated there, and that if the railroads would provide 1,000 cars a day—and they have done so before—this amount of grain could be stored at Thunder Bay within six weeks.

This would mean something like \$75 million of new money being placed in the hands of farmers in the eastern part of Saskatchewan and all of Manitoba, a sum represented by approximately a two-bushel quota, even after they had paid back a portion of their cash advances. It is true that if we allow time to fritter away the grain will eventually move to the Lakehead and fill up this space three months from now. My point is that the farm-

ers need this cash today, tomorrow and the next day; they require it very soon in order to meet the commitments of spring seeding operations.

The second suggestion I have is, I feel, an important one which would take up the serious slack caused by the absence of a final payment this spring. I have made it on other occasions in this House. It is that the government should make a substantial acreage payment available. This should amount to at least \$2 an acre up to 400 acres. A larger payment would be even better, provided the treasury, whose accounts are now showing a substantial surplus, would loosen up. Assistance of this type was forthcoming on three occasions through legislation brought forward by a government I had the honour to serve. It proved very effective in conditions which were far less trying than those which now exist. If the government wishes to approach the problem in another way, it could introduce wheat acreage reduction payments with the stipulation that the money made available be used to establish livestock herds of cattle or pigs.

I believe a further suggestion should be put forward at this point. I have made it on previous occasions and the minister told me he would take note of it. I have heard it put forward in many areas of western Canada. It is this: farmers would appreciate a moratorium in connection with repayments due under the Farm Improvement Loans Act, the Farm Credit Act and the new farm machinery legislation. If these demands were postponed for one year, I am sure it would assist the farming population to a great extent in meeting the present emergency.

● (8:10 p.m.)

In any event, the problems of agriculture require immediate action. If the House wants evidence of prices in the west, let me read some newspaper headlines. I have before me the *Toronto Daily Star* of January 17, 1970. This indicates that even in eastern Canada people are beginning to appreciate the situation. The headline is, "The disenchanting prairies". The next headline is, "Gusher of prairie discontent will alter our future". The next sub-heading is, "Alberta leaders start looking enviously at the fruits of separatism". Those are headlines in just one newspaper.

Let me quote again from the *Toronto Daily Star* of the same date. The headline is, "Prairies rage at grain glut and money famine". The next sub-heading is, "A Manitoba farmer goes carpentering". Another heading is "It's