

There has been a big change in a year and a half. Now the government is saying Canada has some of the largest markets it has ever had for grain. I ask the government once again to be considerate and to tell the farmers what is really happening. Earlier this afternoon the hon. member for Winnipeg South Centre (Mr. Osler) stated that Lift is the instrument which obtained all the extra grain sales for us, if in fact we have made many extra sales. I suggest that Lift did not have anything to do with it. There will be larger grain sales because of international circumstances, crop failures, drought and things of that sort.

I think the government overestimated the inventory of wheat in this country. They should realize that now. The government is in a very fortunate position because the farmers did not co-operate to the full extent and 50 per cent of the wheat acreage was planted this year. Also, the crops were good. Therefore we have enough grain to meet the increased sales and for domestic use. In a patronizing and ironic way through the use of operation Lift, the government has been very fortunate. I do not think, however that the farmers of western Canada can really forgive the government for the attitude it has taken on this question.

Many members from both sides of this House have underestimated the real economic value of the western farmer. Not only is the western farmer suffering, but in a province such as Saskatchewan the whole economy is suffering. When driving around the province it can be seen that a whole way of life is being threatened. The small villages, towns and cities are affected. It is a natural phenomenon because farm income has dropped by over 50 per cent in the last couple of years. People are not buying as much as they used to, construction is pretty well at a standstill and people are moving out of the province.

Places like Yorkton, with a population of some 14,000 in the 10 or 12-year period prior to 1968 almost doubled their population. In the last year people have been leaving and the population has probably dropped by 400 or 500. This is the story of many communities of that size in Saskatchewan. It is basically the young people who are leaving in search of better opportunities. They are found in almost every walk of life, young workers, professional people, teachers and people hoping to get into business. Left behind are the people who are trying to struggle on the farm.

● (5:20 p.m.)

Someone said the other day that the average age of a Saskatchewan farmer is 57. This is perhaps the oldest average age of a worker in any industry. Those older farmers who do remain on the land are often left behind on farms which are small and uneconomic. What we need in Saskatchewan is planning. Farmers on the Prairies need a guarantee that when they plant a crop they will get a market for it and a decent price. There are many efficient farmers with the reserves needed to carry out an effective operation. There are many others who have the desire and the courage to make a success

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of agriculture. But they need planning from the government and some extra help.

The other day I asked the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Olson) one or two questions about the fate of the report of the Barber commission on farm machinery prices. Action along the lines recommended by that commission as a means of lowering the price of farm machinery is urgently needed. In the past few years, while the price of grain has gone down the price of farm machinery and the cost of living generally as it affects farmers have steadily increased. This is the reason for the unrest in western Canada, for the expressions of western alienation. The difficulties which the west continues to encounter cannot be ignored by the government simply because it has been able to announce extra grain sales for the balance of the year. A lot more than that is needed.

Mr. Speaker, a debate on the Speech from the Throne gives hon. members an opportunity to discuss Canadian affairs generally and to consider what direction we are taking. A couple of years ago during the election campaign, the Prime Minister was talking about building a just society, reducing regional economic disparities, wiping out poverty and, above all, building a society in which there would be participatory democracy. It seems to me that 2½ years later there is greater dissent and more uneasiness than ever before. We see this among young people who are dropping out of society, joining various youth cultures and ceasing to care any more. One senses this spirit of dissent among ordinary people when visiting door to door or farm to farm. People are unhappy about the way things are going; they seem to have lost faith in the future envisaged by the Prime Minister and his friends a couple of years ago.

Among farmers, among workers and among students, dissent is being expressed in an organized manner. We find the women of Canada demanding rights which should be theirs and, of course, we are faced with an outright expression of violent dissent from members of the FLQ in the province of Quebec. The question all of us must ask is this: Why are so many people unhappy? Why are they questioning the society in which they live? Ours is a wealthy country with an advanced technology and all the resources we seem to need. We have a government which is supposed to be liberal, which is supposed to be changing things. Why should so much dissatisfaction exist in these circumstances?

Mr. Speaker, when we take a close look at our economy we find it is one which we ourselves do not really control, that essentially it is controlled by outside interests whose primary concern is not ours. We find that one out of every five Canadians lives in poverty and that one out of every five others lives near the poverty line. We see unemployment reaching a seasonally adjusted rate of 6.7 per cent, the highest for years. We find the air and water around us being polluted at such a rate that within the lifetime of many of us in this chamber, it is said by some authorities, there may not be sufficient oxygen left for us to breathe. These are some of the reasons so many Canadians today are unhappy and demanding change.