

Business of Supply

At the present time the railway companies are taking cars out of grain movement, claiming this is because they have introduced the block system which will ensure greater efficiency. But they did not have enough cars in operation in the first place. It is probable that there will be another pile-up at the Lakehead on April 1 when the navigation season opens.

Mr. Speaker, the economic effect of the present situation is obvious. With the shortage of cash, farmers are not able to pay their bills. We already have reports of what is happening regarding payments due on Farm Credit Corporation loans. We also have many examples of reduced employment on the prairies. Many people are moving from Saskatchewan, in particular, for this reason. In my own city of Regina the cement plant closed down for the first three months of 1969 and it will probably be closed for four months this year. In 1969 it was closed for a total of 18 weeks. Some of the major motor car dealers are experiencing considerable difficulty, as are the farm implement dealers. As the member for Regina-Lake Centre (Mr. Benjamin) pointed out, we have never seen so many "For rent" signs on premises on the main streets of the city.

There is a population drain from Saskatchewan greater than anything seen since the time of the previous Liberal government prior to the election of the CCF government. Last year the population of Saskatchewan decreased by 6,000. Add to this figure the natural increase in population, and we see that the situation is really much worse than that figure indicates. Thus, the income situation in Saskatchewan is quite desperate for many farmers, yet we find that the government has failed to deal with this situation.

• (8:50 p.m.)

Farmers find it very frustrating when ministers and spokesmen of the Liberal party and the government point to cash advances as the big thing that was done to help farmers. Mr. Speaker, everyone acknowledges the important role of cash advances, but everyone knows that they are not a solution to pressing problems. Farmers become increasingly frustrated and resentful when they find Liberal Party spokesmen and government spokesmen falling back on this sort of argument. Is it any wonder that at the present time there is talk for secession in the west? There is no need for this sort of talk. It is not the way people really feel and it is not what they want to do. But this type of situation arises out of frus-

[Mr. Burton.]

tration and resentment because of the failure of the federal government to take any concrete action and to review grievances over the past year.

It is for that reason that my colleague the hon. member for Saskatoon-Biggar (Mr. Gleave), seconded by myself, moved the amendment which asked the federal government to consider a deficiency payment for the 1968-69 crop year sufficient to assure the farmer of a final return equivalent to the \$1.95½ minimum price established under the International Grains Arrangement.

I suggest that a case can be made for this amendment on the ground that the International Grains Arrangement was entered into by Canada as a nation. It was not entered into by the Canadian Wheat Board, the farmers or the farm organizations; it was ratified by Canada as a nation. When Canada entered into that agreement, by implication it also made the commitment to its farmers that they would be paid at least the minimum grain prices over the life of the arrangement. We see what is happening this year. The Minister without Portfolio made it quite clear that there will be no final payment on the 1968-69 crop pool. We feel that this is the very least the federal government should do in dealing with the present situation.

The second part of our amendment calls for the appointment of a transport controller. Recently, after months and months of pressure, we had the announcement of a transport co-ordinator or controller at the Vancouver terminals. It seems to me that the appointment of this official supports and backs up the need for our having an official with the authority necessary to deal with all aspects of grain movement in the prairie region and right through to the Lakehead. I think it should be made clear that the block system is not the final answer to transportation problems. I think it should be said that it is a help, but that it does not deal with the total transportation situation.

Thus we see the record, Mr. Speaker. The problems of farmers and of agriculture have probably been debated more than any other topic in this House over the past year. Is it any wonder that the events of the past year and the inaction of the government have led to despair? Finally the government comes along and says, "It is too late to do anything about the problem because the time to deal with it is past." That is the government's usual way of getting out of many situations.