

Proceedings on Adjournment Motion

27th, I would appreciate some comments and a positive reply from the department, the minister or any other spokesman.

Mr. Yves Forest (Parliamentary Secretary to President of the Privy Council): Mr. Speaker, we appreciate the interest shown in this matter by the hon. member when many people of the region of Victoriaville have heard that the Canadian National Railways intended to discontinue completely their passenger service in the region.

However, when we consider the situation, we hear that at no time have the Canadian National Railways proposed to discontinue their passenger service but rather that they anticipate a reduction in the service.

I may also add that because of the complaints that were received concerning the proposed reduction, the railway transport committee of the Canadian Transport Commission is now considering the situation. The result of their study and their recommendations will be available in the near future and the Minister of Transport (Mr. Hellyer) will be happy to report on the subject to the hon. member.

[English]

AGRICULTURE—DETERIORATION OF SITUATION ON THE PRAIRIES

Mr. John Burton (Regina East): Mr. Speaker, on Friday last I asked the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Olson) the following question:

—is the government carrying on consultations with the provinces and other interested parties to consider measures to alleviate the serious income problem now facing the prairie farmers and also to counteract the deteriorating crop conditions which are getting worse by the day?

The minister in his answer could only refer to the cash advances proposal of which the house is already aware.

Today the right hon. member for Prince Albert (Mr. Diefenbaker) also addressed a question to the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) on this problem. The Prime Minister evaded an answer by referring the problem to the Minister of Agriculture and the Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce (Mr. Pepin), both of whom were absent.

This crisis situation has developed over the past month as a result of unusually large amounts of rainfall and prolonged periods of inclement weather, which have prevented farmers from completing their harvest. The latest report of the Saskatchewan wheat pool states that 56 per cent of the harvest had

been completed by October 4. Since that time there has been very little favourable weather. Over the past week end some districts received one inch of rainfall or more to add to the existing surplus of moisture.

The *Globe and Mail* today stated:

At the end of last week... about one-quarter of the crop in Manitoba, more than one-third in Saskatchewan and two-thirds in Alberta remained in the field.

The lack of progress in harvesting has been felt most severely in the northern half of the agricultural area in Saskatchewan, in areas of Manitoba, and in most of Alberta. In most of these areas, reports indicate that from 25 per cent to 40 per cent of the crop has been harvested, compared to some 80 per cent in some southern areas. With short, cool days and a surplus of moisture, it is probable that a large number of farmers will have to leave part of their crops in the field over the winter.

In addition, many farmers have sizable carryovers of grain stocks from last year. Quotas ranged from five to six bushels and grain officials estimate that this year a five bushel quota is the most that can be expected, with more pessimistic estimates suggesting four bushels. The continuing tight international market situation shows no promise of change. Today's *Globe and Mail* comments:

Farmers in the prairie provinces will have little spare money in the coming year. Farm income in the area is heading into a period of depression brought about by the combination of weakness in the world wheat market and crop damage from a wet harvesting season. "A lot of smaller farmers will be squeezed out this year," a Saskatchewan Wheat Pool official said in Regina.

Farm costs continue to rise at a level of 4 per cent to 5 per cent per year, while farm prices have dropped sharply. In particular, wheat prices dropped by some 22 cents per bushel in 1967 when farmers were left exposed during the period between the expiry of the old international wheat agreement and the beginning of the new international grains arrangement.

• (10:10 p.m.)

There are a number of measures the government might consider to alleviate the problem. True, the situation could improve somewhat before freeze-up, but it is now clear that much of the crop will stay out in the field, much of the crop being harvested is in tough or damp condition, and in numerous cases there are problems involved in moving tough and damp grain to drying facilities.