

Supply—Agriculture

When the minister spoke of the Ontario corn growers he said:

I suspect that many farmers who protested to Ottawa that they were losing money on corn production did only half the calculation. They charged up their land at appreciated values when calculating their costs but did not record the appreciation as income.

This is but one example of the fuzzy economic reasoning which often confronts and plagues farm policy makers. It is a luxury we can scarcely afford if we are to put the Canadian agricultural industry on a sound business footing, which must be the eventual aim of long term farm policy.

The corn market is inundated by cheap United States corn and the farmers have protested to Ottawa. Yet the minister, in effect, accuses them of cooking their books.

The president of Federal Grain Limited of Winnipeg estimates that 800 million bushels, or 72 per cent of the grain crop, are either tough or damp. He is quoted in Monday's *Globe and Mail* as saying the situation in western Canada is even more critical than we first thought. He has suggested there are 458 million bushels of tough or damp grain, 25 million of which are still standing in the field; 181 million bushels of barley, 176 million bushels of oats and 11 million bushels of oilseeds. I understand that the optimum capacity of all farm dryers is about 300 million bushels between now and spring, and that the total of commercial capacity and on the farm capacity is only half the total of damp grain predicted by the Federal Grain Limited survey to which I have just referred.

When the hon. members for Qu'Appelle-Moose Mountain and Lisgar sought an emergency debate the other day the minister was not able to be in the house and the government was, in the words of one western newspaper, "tongue-tied". I suggest that the persistence of the Prime Minister in treating the ministers as schoolboys, forcing them to stay out of the house on certain days, has caused real frustration not only among opposition members in this house but in the country generally.

• (4:00 p.m.)

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Stanfield: It has caused real frustration in particular to members who are trying to do their job for the people they represent. In no case is this more true than of the members who represent the prairie provinces of Canada. On Monday and Tuesday all ministers with any responsibility touching agriculture are under strict orders from the Prime

Minister not to appear in the house—the Minister of Agriculture, the Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce, the Minister without Portfolio from Saskatchewan, the Minister of Transport and his assistant, the Minister without Portfolio from Manitoba.

The hon. member for Huron has asked whether the government will assist in the transportation of grain drying equipment now available in eastern Canada, to help alleviate the problem. What is the decision? Nobody knows. I hope the minister will give it to us today. The hon. member for Qu'Appelle-Moose Mountain has raised the possibility of acreage payments to assist in covering the cost of drying the crop. There has been no answer. I hope we will receive an answer today. The hon. member for Crowfoot has asked about placing additional equipment at the inland terminals. The Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce says he will take it under consideration.

The damp grain problem was brought to the attention of the government in early November. Action has been delayed; it has been reluctant. The minister need not shake his head. I have been sitting in the house and have watched the complacent reaction of ministers week after week as this crisis developed until it finally came to a head last week. As I say, Mr. Chairman, action has been delayed; it has been reluctant, it has been half-hearted. They have finally got the Lakehead facilities operating 24 hours a day, six days a week. But when the hon. member for Mackenzie inquired yesterday the Minister without Portfolio had to admit that they are not ready to operate seven days a week because negotiations are still under way with the unions. This could have been done and ought to have been done weeks ago.

The hon. member for Mackenzie asked last week whether arrangements could be made to have the commercial dryers come to the elevators dry the grain already purchased and transfer it to the annexes to relieve some of the congestion. Again, he was told the matter would be taken under consideration. The government has had to be prodded, pushed and hounded to accept even an awareness of the problem and then to take some reluctant action. This is made all the more difficult and frustrating by the irresponsible practice of ministers working a three-day week as far as the House of Commons is concerned.

Mr. Olson: We work seven days a week.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh.