

portion of that foreign exchange has come from the grain industry. If we suddenly had no grain to sell or we continued to sell it at an unprofitable level, as has been the case in the last few years, the amount of foreign exchange will be reduced and eventually we will be the captives of the countries to which we ship our grain.

We are asking the user to pay for the cost of production of wheat used domestically, plus a little more. The Hon. Member very eloquently made the point that that would raise the price of bread only a few cents, if it was transferred directly to the farmer from the miller. I could make the same point in terms of barley. If we increased the cost of malt barley by about \$5 per bushel, 40 cents would be added to the cost of a dozen beer, as malt barley is used to make beer. Most people who eat bread, drink beer and use other Canadian products would be quite willing to pay the extra price if they were assured that the money would be going to the primary producers or farmers, not being diverted to middlemen along the way.

Farmers are an important part of our economy. I am glad the Hon. Member for Swift Current-Maple Creek (Mr. Wilson) made a plea for assistance to farmers. I hope his motion, as well as Bill C-215, the parity Bill, in the name of the Hon. Member for Yorkton-Melville (Mr. Nystrom), go before a committee or subcommittee where witnesses will be called. Then we will be able to look at it in the same way as we are presently looking at the stabilization plan and, hopefully, when a recommendation is made by the committee, the Government will act on it in a manner different from how it acted on the recommendations of the Standing Committee on Finance, Trade and Economic Affairs regarding agri-bonds and Section 31.

We must remember that one farmer feeds approximately 72 people. If we pay him parity price, he buys the products and services on the market. The Hon. Member for Swift Current-Maple Creek will recognize more than others in the House that if we pay the farmer well for his products, he will go out and buy a truck or an extra combine. A plant in Welland, Kitchener, Oshawa or Windsor has to produce that truck or combine. He will purchase products produced by the rest of the country. Sometimes I think we are bailing out the wrong people. Perhaps instead of bailing out Massey-Ferguson, we should be bailing out farmers, or at least paying them enough so that they can purchase the products they need.

There is one thing about farmers: They never let money stay in their pockets. One can tell the prosperity of a farm community by the number of pick-up trucks on Main Street. In a good year they are all new; in a bad year they are two years to three years old. We should assist the economy of Canada by ensuring that farmers obtain the cost of production plus a little more.

If the Hon. Member for Swift Current-Maple Creek is part of the committee, I am sure he will support the same kind of approach for other products; in fact, if possible, for all products. He suggested that it was complicated. Perhaps it is, but the situation will be much more complicated if we reduce the number of farmers out there.

Wheat Prices

In the last six years to ten years, the farm debt in Canada increased from \$7 billion to \$21 billion. In fact the 1983-84 figure is something like \$28 billion. Even when farmers looked like they were prospering on the farms in the last few years, that was not the case. They were prospering on borrowed money. We must do something about that. The way to do it would be to give them enough for their products so that they could pay off their debts.

Earlier today I expressed, I suppose one could say, the horror of recognition that in the last 13 years the percentage of the national income of farmers had gone down from 6.3 per cent to less than 1 per cent, while that of the banks and financial corporations had gone up from 1.26 per cent up to over 10 per cent. Just last week the banks told us they had the most profitable year ever last year. The farmers had their worst year ever. There is something symbolic about that but we have to deal with that issue separately. We could partially solve it by making it possible for farmers to get enough of a return on their products to pay off that debt. In Saskatchewan in 1966 there were 85,686 farmers. Today the figure would be somewhere between 60,000 and 65,000. The interest on the debt I was talking about has increased over those same six years by 322 per cent. That has become a major part of the reason why farmers are not making a profit. I am using Saskatchewan figures because I am most familiar with them and we are talking about grain farming, and the cost of petroleum products in Saskatchewan in that period of time rose 284 per cent; fertilizer rose 218 per cent. Chemicals rose 274 per cent. The Hon. Member for Swift Current-Maple Creek suggested that the farm production has not paid for those increases. If you look back six years you will find the prices we were getting for farm products then were better than what we are getting now, not just for wheat but for all those farm products. The grain from my farm has sat out in a swath for almost two months. We got 50 bushels to the acre but we are selling it for a dollar eighty a bushel because it is almost unfit for human consumption and good only for feed. That will not be taken care of to any extent by this Bill, it needs to be taken care of by stabilization or insurance payments. However, this motion would make me and I guess the farmers of Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Alberta and Ontario who raise wheat feel much more secure than we do under present circumstances.

● (1640)

We as farmers are told we are producing too much. At the same time we are told that the people of the world are starving. Surely in this day and age of great advances in communications and transportation we can do something about that. Not too long ago experts from the Bank of Canada suggested that half the family farms in Canada should disappear. That is the kind of support we seem to be getting from some of the institutions which should be giving us a great deal of support. We should approach this whole idea of farm structure a little more globally. For instance, right now we are told that countries around the world cannot buy our wheat and other products. That is true, they cannot. However, companies