

we are experiencing our highest cost of living, the worst inflation and the highest interest rates that we have ever known. The agricultural industry is staggering, we have a housing crisis and we have disunity in the country. You name it; we have it.

I listened with interest to the tortuous defence that the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Olson) put forward in respect of the government's agricultural policies or, rather, its lack of them. Replying to several members, the minister dispensed his usual plausible nonsense. The fact is that his smokescreen covered up the government's lack of agricultural policies. He attempted to say—this is the inference that I drew from his remarks and no doubt it is also what other hon. members think—that the farmers of this country had never had it so good.

Some hon. Members: Shame!

Mr. McCleave: Tell that to the farmers. They will not believe it.

Mr. Southam: Two of the main economic problems raised today revolve around two of the basic sectors of our economy. Those problems are, firstly, the plight of our manpower forces, a plight brought about by the highest degree of unemployment in Canada since the hungry thirties and, secondly, the very seriously depressed condition of the Canadian agricultural industry. My own province of Saskatchewan has, in common with all other provinces, been hard hit by unemployment. This problem was debated seriously in the House during the past few days and I shall have more to say about it later in my remarks.

I wish to speak in the short time allotted to me about the serious plight facing our agricultural industry. The agri-industry in Canada represents the second largest source of income in our country, wood pulp and paper being first. Today agriculture is in the worst state of depression since the dust-bowl days of the thirties. Why has this situation come about in Canada? It is not nearly so bad in other countries. The answer, Mr. Speaker, is that this government and the previous government headed by Right Hon. Lester B. Pearson have lacked the experience necessary—I would even say, at times, the interest—to administer this most important segment of our economy.

Evidence of this lack of experience and lack of policy is found in all the royal commissions, task forces, agricultural congresses, grains committees, conferences, white papers and emergency meetings which have been set up to study the problems of our great agricultural industry. All these studies have done is create a great big political mirage which has led the farmer to believe that something is being done—and all of it has turned out to be window-dressing. The fact is that the costs of agriculture are accelerating by leaps and bounds and the return that the farmer receives for his produce in most cases is going down. The cost-price squeeze is now worse than ever before.

To further substantiate my charge, Mr. Speaker, that this government is floundering in the area of agricultural policy one only has to listen to the many questions that

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farmers are asking about government policies. The following are just a few of the many they have raised. They ask, first, what will replace the stability of grain prices once enjoyed under the International Wheat Agreement and more recently under the International Grains Arrangement which has just collapsed. Will there be a domestic two-price system that our competitors in other countries enjoy? Second, will acreage reduction programs be carried on in a similar way to the Lift program?

Third, will forage crop acreage increases be subsidized? Fourth, when will initial prices for the new crop year be set? Fifth, when will the new quota formula be established? Sixth, when will the various suggestions made under last fall's stabilization of grains policy be adopted and announced? Seventh, when will the Menzies report on the Canadian Wheat Board administration be released? Eighth, when will the serious fears relating to the government's white paper on tax reform be removed? I am talking of those fears which apply to agriculture. Ninth, does the government plan to move small farmers off the farm? Tenth, does the government intend to establish a special sales force to sell Canadian grains and products around the world? So the questions go, Mr. Speaker. All around there is widespread concern and confusion.

I wish to comment for a few moments on the minister's announcement of Thursday last concerning the collapse of the International Grains Arrangement. This announcement, I might say, was greeted with expressions of utter dismay, shock and even horror.

Mr. McCleave: The Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Olson) is leaving the chamber. He will not wait.

Mr. Southam: The minister referred to this general question—

Mr. McCleave: The minister is leaving. He should stop and listen.

Mr. Southam:—and went on to say that a great deal of good could emanate from the present arrangement even though there had been a complete collapse.

Mr. McCleave: The minister has gone.

Mr. Southam: I am referring to what the Minister of Manpower and Immigration (Mr. Lang), who reports to the House for the Canadian Wheat Board, said last Thursday. I quote from page 3275 of *Hansard* for February 11. The minister said in part:

The results of this conference are far removed from what Canada had sought to obtain. However it should be borne in mind that the price provisions of the 1967 agreement have not been operative for some time. While the new wheat agreement now being concluded is of only limited significance—

Think about that, Mr. Speaker. That is quite the contrary of what the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Olson) has just stated.

Mr. McCleave: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a question of privilege. The minister to whom the hon. member has just referred, the Minister of Agriculture, has left. The Minister of Manpower and Immigration (Mr. Lang), who