Suggested Payment to Western Farmers

Mr. Lewis: In such a situation, what is the problem? As I see it, the problem is not that there is no need for the food Canada produces. It is trite to remind members of this House that there are hundreds of millions of people round this globe who go hungry to bed every night of the year and who have an immense need for the grains and other food we produce.

The problems of Canadian farmers are, by and large, the same as those of farmers around the world. They derive from the vagaries of the weather and from the vagaries of the international market. They arise, in other words, out of circumstances over which the farmer and the farming community have no control whatever. This is why it is the duty of government and of Parliament to make sure that farmers receive the net income to which they are entitled.

Whenever we talk about assisting farmers everybody in the country, it seems to me, particularly in the urban centres, gets worried. Let me remind members of this House and the people of Canada that we do not bat an eyelid—certainly those technocrats across the aisle do not bat an eyelid—when the government makes available to large corporations, most of which are foreign-owned, an amount in the order of $1 billion annually. Yet when one asks for $250 million to help western Canadian farmers, the government reduces the amount to $100 million, whittles it down still further, and then attaches it to a form of blackmail which the government knows the Canadian farmer is unhappy with and finds unacceptable. We believe this is total nonsense. We believe a new approach must be taken by Parliament and the people. We believe the government should stop its present treatment of family farms in this country and assist young people to set up in farming should they wish to do so.

In my opinion the subject we have introduced today is of great importance not only to the agricultural industry and the farmers who engage in it but to Canadian society as a whole, both in its general aspect and the demand for an immediate pay-out, without conditions and without blackmail, for at last $100 million to the western grain growers.

● (12:30 p.m.)

Mr. Olson: Mr. Speaker, I do not wish at this point to participate in the debate but I should like to raise a point of order that I would ask you to take into account. It is related to whether or not we can have two debates on the same subject running concurrently before the House. I waited until the hon. member for York South had completed his remarks, but I should like to ascertain whether or not the $100 million and the conditions and so on that he talked about in his motion are the same as the $100 million and the alleged conditions contained in Bill C 244. I take it that is the intent of the motion.

If that is the case, then if we speak about the other points that were made with respect to the purpose of the motion, having a vote in the House on this $100 million, and indeed on the so-called conditions attached, before the election in Saskatchewan—though that is not important to my point of order—and we argue the reasons for

[Mr. Lewis.]

the other parts of Bill C-244, then I suggest that we will be paralleling a debate on a subject that has been initiated in the House and is currently before a standing committee of the House for disposition and report back to the House. Therefore I find it difficult to respond to the wording of the motion unless we are allowed to trespass upon a matter that is already before the House in Bill C-244.

Mr. Lewis: On the point of order, Mr. Speaker, may I point out that the motion was very carefully drawn—I know that is the case because I participated in drawing it—so as to make clear that it was not to be a duplicate debate. We are asking for the immediate pay-out of a minimum of $100 million without conditions and in addition to other farm assistance programs. I point out that Bill C-244 not only proposes payment of $100 million but also proposes to eliminate from present assistance programs, if I remember correctly, the legislation dealing with storage payments and also—

Mr. Olson: Now you are duplicating the debate on that bill.

Mr. Lewis: —eliminate PFAA. It is proposed to eliminate certain farm assistance programs, and the $100 million provided in that bill is intended to take their place.

I suggest to the Minister of Agriculture that this does not impinge on the other legislation precisely because of the wording of the motion. I could take the time to indicate very briefly that, as I understand Bill C-244, the result of it would not be to pay out $100 million additional to the grain growers of western Canada but would result in the paying out of no more than $40 million or $50 million additional to these farmers. This motion very clearly calls for a pay-out of a minimum of $100 million.

The Minister of Agriculture may find it difficult to speak to the motion for a number of reasons. He may even have some conscience about the subject.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Laniel): Order, please. Would the hon. member please resume his seat. The Chair is ready to hear comments on the point of order but it cannot allow hon. members to debate the position taken by other members; that can be done when we debate the motion. The remarks of hon. members should be related directly to the point of order.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, I trust that the Minister of Agriculture will forgive me if I suggest that he was not entirely clear as to the point of order he was raising. Perhaps he was raising two points of order, and, if so, I should like to comment upon them. If he was raising a point of order as to the validity of the motion, then I suggest he is half an hour late. The Chair put the motion and no questions were asked at that time. I suggest that to question the validity of the motion at this point is hardly appropriate. On the other hand, if that is not his point of order and he is accepting the validity of the motion but is asking that hon. members speak to the motion rather than debate some other bill, then I think this is a hypothetical point that should be