

McCartin

Mr President, first of all I want to thank Parliament for allowing us to bring up this subject of the disastrous weather conditions in Ireland. I was a little disappointed this morning that we did not agree to take it higher up on the agenda, because we have been discussing things which of course are important but for which we have neither direct competence nor responsibility.

In this field, the European institutions have a responsibility. The Community has a responsibility for farmers' incomes and the Community can, in this case, help the Irish Government to resolve what is really a disaster. I think those were the words of Mr Legrand when he visited Ireland yesterday. He said: 'This is really a disaster'. It is not a spectacular disaster like the whirlwinds, or the landslides, or the earthquakes. Irish rain falls softly but persistently: but at a certain stage it can become a disaster — which it is now.

I want to thank Commissioner Andriessen for having met myself and Mr Clinton and Mr Raftery when we visited Brussels a week ago, during the holiday period. It was very kind of Mr Andriessen and his cabinet to sit down and discuss with us the problem and listen to the solutions we proposed.

I want to make this constructive remark. There are quite a number of schemes that have already been passed and money provided by the European Communities for schemes in Ireland. The money has not all been taken up in the Western Development Package and in the Disadvantaged Area Scheme — and I think there are one or two others. There is European money unspent which we can devote to this. In addition, if we had increased or even maintained agricultural production, we should have had to finance the selling of it at low prices. I therefore do not think that we have to increase our budget dramatically to provide useful assistance.

*(Applause from the centre and from the right)*

Mr Hume (S). — I rise to support the resolution that is before the House in the name of four groups in a display of unanimity on a matter which affects both parts of Ireland. However, not only has there been unanimity among groups in this House: it is the first time I remember all Irish Members being agreed about something. When you get that rare degree of unanimity in Ireland — and all 18 Members in this House are unanimous on this issue today — then something serious has happened. Something very serious has happened in Northern and Southern Ireland over the summer to our most fundamental and most important industry, agriculture.

We have had daily rainfall for more than two months. We have had the wettest summer since 1918. We have had up to three times the normal rainfall and little sunshine. Most of Ireland is waterlogged and many of our

river basins are flooded. The net effect of that, of course, has been a disaster for the winter fodder situation with consequential disaster in every sector of the agricultural industry. Already, many farmers involved in the beef industry have sought to sell their cattle rapidly because of the shortage of fodder, and this has led to a 40% drop in beef prices. Disaster looms for the suckler men who sell their calves in the autumn, for, of course, there will be a serious drop in demand. Disease arising from the weather conditions has struck the sheep sector — liver-fluke disease.

There has been a drop in milk yields and in the North of Ireland alone 50% of the potato crop has been lost — 25% from blight and 25% rotted. We do not think we are exaggerating, Mr President, when we call on the Commission to designate all of Ireland, both North and South, as a special assistance area because of weather damage. In particular, we would like them — as a matter of urgency — to get into discussion with the governments concerned with a view to developing a package of measures for both parts of Ireland which will help farmers to survive this crisis.

There are three questions I would draw their attention to for this package. I have already mentioned special measures for beef. I would support Mr Maher's call for sufficient quantities of intervention grain to supply the shortfall in feedstuffs for the winter. Finally, of course, the provision of headage payments to offset what is happening in the beef and sheep sectors at the moment.

I am pleased that all four groups have given their support. I am very pleased to see the unanimity in the island of Ireland itself on this issue, and I hope that unanimity will be reflected in the vote at the end of this debate.

*(Applause)*

Mr Provan (ED). — Mr President, on behalf of my group and also personally as a Scottish farmer, I would like to express our sympathy and concern to all the Irish producers who are caught in such difficult circumstances at the moment. I think it is important for them to realize at home that we have had some very impassioned pleas and some very eloquent speeches from their Members here this afternoon.

Nothing can concern a farmer more than the worry of not knowing how he is to feed his animals through the winter. It affects not only his animals but his bank balance as well. It is a continuing situation that these producers are going to have to face. Of course, agriculture is a risk business. We have to appreciate that. Of course, the CAP has altered some of the traditional patterns of production. Ireland has a very serious problem. Let us try and resolve that situation.

Mr President, I would like this Parliament to realize that other parts of northern Europe are also facing dif-