

Withholding of Grain Payments

Mr. Hees: That is putting it very straight.

Mr. Stanfield: In 1957, a little before my time here, it was the pipeline debate which showed the people of Canada that it was time to rid itself of a government which had lost everything but its own arrogance. In 1971, after a long series of inexcusable blunders and tragic miscalculations, we have the final touch of madness—the government's set refusal to pay to Canadian citizens money which is due to those citizens under the law of the land.

Some hon. Members: Shame.

Mr. Stanfield: In 1957—

Mr. Hees: In 1956.

Mr. Stanfield: In 1956—I am corrected by the hon. member for Prince Edward-Hastings (Mr. Hees); I am always subject to correction—it was contempt for the rights of Parliament which led the Liberal government of that day to its destruction. In 1971 it is contempt for the very laws themselves, which the government feels secure enough to flout, in the face of this House and of the Canadian people.

I have no intention of denying the importance of the particular law in question. There are many thousands of farmers who are affected by the government's refusal to pay the money it legally owes to the Wheat Board. Whole communities, whole provinces, are affected by the action, or inaction if you like, of hon. gentlemen opposite in this respect. The minister in charge of the Wheat Board said the other night that he owed a great debt to many people. I say he does owe a great debt, and it is not to the backbenchers who applaud him and it is not to his advisors who tell him how to justify his negligence; it is to the people of Canada who have for too long trusted him and trusted the word of the government. It is a debt, in fact, to the people of Canada who have trusted the laws of Canada. That is the tragedy and that is the crime. It is a crime, because no government has the right to ignore the law, the very law which this or any other government swears to uphold. The government can ask Parliament to change the law, but the government has no right to flout the law.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Stanfield: That is the case we wish to make, Sir. That is the case we wish to bring home to the Canadian people. A government is elected, among other things, on the basis of its intentions and its programs. I agree with that. But a government is not elected, at least in a democracy, to ignore the law which exists. A parliamentary democracy may not be perfect. Indeed, it is far from perfect. But any government which tries to claim its own perfection by ignoring democracy and ignoring the law is a government which does not deserve the trust of Parliament or the trust of the people who elected it.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Stanfield: There are some—I have seen their observations and their comments—who believe that we in the opposition are not really serious when we attack the government on this point. They suggest we do not really mean

it when we discuss the possibility of impeaching, for example, the Minister of Finance (Mr. Benson) for his part in this affair. Well, they are partly right, Mr. Speaker. We do not really want to separate the minister's head from his shoulders; we should be delighted if we could get the two together. What we do want is to point out to the Canadian people that we now have before us a government which is not only acting ineffectively and incompetently in a whole range of economic policies, we also have a government which is acting illegally.

There are a number of things which I find almost incredible about this government. But there is nothing I find more incredible than a former dean of a law school of a respected university in this country who is not only conniving at the breaking of the law, but is brazenly suggesting to the House that the law does not even matter. The minister responsible for the Wheat Board did not even try to justify himself before this House. He cited no precedent for his unheard of action. He offered no defence. All he did was to attack the opposition in this House for not jumping to the government's whip, and mildly and meekly passing any measure that this government in its wisdom might see fit to present to the House. At least the opposition was acting within its lawful rights, Mr. Speaker. At least the opposition was acting within the law. That is more than we can say for this government, and that is more than this government can say for itself.

• (3:20 p.m.)

Unable to deny that he had defied the law, the minister put on a bit of a show. He pretended that this flouting of the law was an act of bravery on his part. He said that he would be willing to go to jail in the interests of the farmers. I have a very strong stomach, Mr. Speaker, but I almost lost my supper in view of the posturing of the minister that night. What does the minister expect? Does he expect us to propose him for the Victoria Cross for breaking the law? It was a pitiful performance, and I should like to think that it was a performance that was unworthy of the minister. I leave that judgment in the final analysis for his own conscience.

They say that patriotism is the last refuge of a scoundrel. I say that self-righteousness is the last refuge of a man who has done wrong, who knows he has done wrong, who is at this moment still doing wrong, and who can see no honourable exit for himself. But I will suggest to the minister one honourable way out which will also make him feel better. It is to admit frankly to this House and to the Canadian people that he has done wrong. Such an admission, perhaps, will not do his judgment credit but it might at least do much to save his honour.

Mr. Bigg: His boss has run out on him.

Mr. Stanfield: No; in fairness to the Prime Minister may I say the Prime Minister did explain to me that he had to go, and I accept his very valid reason for leaving the House at the present time.

The unfortunate part is that particular minister is not alone in his guilt. The Minister of Finance is equally guilty. He is the minister who under the law is responsible for paying the moneys in question to the Canadian Wheat Board. It is not a matter of choice on his part; under the law he must pay the money, yet he has not done so. He has