

Withholding of Grain Payments

Mr. Les Benjamin (Regina-Lake Centre): Mr. Speaker, I will not dwell at any length on the legal arguments that have been put forward so ably by the hon. member for York South (Mr. Lewis) and the hon. member for Yukon (Mr. Nielsen), because I think that part of this debate has been more than adequately dealt with, and has yet to be answered by any member on the government side. We may still get some kind of reply, and I will await with anxiety to hear if we do. But I do wish to say that as a layman, not versed in the law, I find it strange that not once in the minister's 30 minute address did he refer to the subject matter of the amendment before us.

I listened as carefully as I could to the minister's remarks, with some of which I shall deal. I only want to say about the legal aspects of the matter just what Mr. Bain said this morning in his column in the *Globe and Mail*, and I quote:

And the point was, and is, that it is Parliament, and not the government, which makes the law and that a law is not made until Parliament makes it, and is not unmade until Parliament unmakes it.

The minister says that in his view, and in the view of the government, Bill C-244 is a package beneficial to farmers. But the farm organizations do not think so, and the farm organizations have said so repeatedly. They have submitted briefs; they have asked; they have pleaded; they have met with the minister, and they have met with his officials. The three prairie governments do not think so either and, Mr. Speaker, the Members of Parliament on this side of the House do not think so. What is even more important, Mr. Speaker, is that farmers themselves do not think so.

I spent a great deal of time during the summer calling on farmers trying to get their opinions. I called on some farmers in the minister's own constituency. I have yet to find a farmer who would say to me that he thought Bill C-244 was good legislation. I have yet to have one farmer say that he is prepared to accept that kind of legislation in order to get an acreage payment this year. I do not know how the minister feels about the views of his constituents, Mr. Speaker, but the farmers in my constituency have got their message through to me very clearly. I consider myself instructed by the grain growers in Regina-Lake Centre to fight this legislation until hell freezes over and, Mr. Speaker, I think I have some obligation to pay some attention to the views of the grain growers in Regina-Lake Centre. Not only have I an obligation but, as a matter of common courtesy if nothing else, I should pay attention to every single grain growers organization in western Canada.

The minister can choose to ignore the Alberta Wheat Pool, the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool, the Manitoba Wheat Pool, the United Grain Growers, the National Farmers Union, the Canadian Federation of Agriculture and the three prairie provincial federations of agriculture, but I do not intend to do that, and no other conscientious member on this side of the House is going to ignore them. It is not too often that farmers and farm organizations are in full agreement on anything. It is a long time since I can recall an issue on which there was such unanimity by the farm organizations and grain farmers.

One sometimes wonders if the minister has read or even listened to the brief of the Canadian Federation of

Agriculture when it was being read to him. No one can call the CFA a bunch of wild-eyed, raving radicals. No one would suggest they are an irresponsible group bent on filibustering and obstruction. The Canadian Federation of Agriculture put the matter bluntly and very succinctly in one sentence in the brief which it presented to the government on May 7. Recommendation No. 2 of the Federation reads:

Aside from the "transitional" payment, the bill is not acceptable as it now stands.

That view is held by all the other farm organizations that I have mentioned. As reported in the *Winnipeg Free Press* of September 21, the Manitoba Minister of Agriculture, Mr. Uskiw, said:

—Mr. Lang's plan doesn't deal with the current crisis of low farm incomes, but establishes a fund which might be beneficial by 1980.

I emphasize those words "might be beneficial by 1980".

"While the program would pay out \$100 million to prairie farmers for this year only, he said, the government has held back nearly \$90 million from the Temporary Wheat Reserves Act and the change amounts to "only a trade-off of programs."

Mr. Lang's plan doesn't take any account of increasing costs of production, he said, and in fact worsens the cash shortage problem because it is withholding payments that would normally be paid to farmers.

"It's like asking someone to open a savings account when his current account is far in the red."

I had hoped that today the minister was going to propose some improvements in the legislation. I had hoped he would say that payments under the Temporary Wheat Reserves Act, at least for the previous crop year, would be made for those 12 months; that the government still intended to press for the rest of the legislation, but that it was prepared to make some changes in it. Had that been done, the House could have moved rapidly on the legislation. But, Mr. Speaker, the minister still remains stubborn and intransigent. He will not listen to the people whom he claims the legislation is designed to help. But the very people he says the program is beneficial to are the ones who tell him and the rest of the members of this House that it is bad legislation, and that it is not acceptable. That cannot be made any plainer, but the minister will not listen.

Does the minister really think and expect that we will sit here and supinely accept something he says is beneficial but which the grain growers of western Canada and all farm organizations say is not beneficial? Does he expect us to abrogate our responsibilities as Members of Parliament? If he does, he has another think coming to him. About the only main thrust, and I suppose one could call it the climax of the minister's speech, was the threat that unless this package of his goes through in a reasonable time the government will have to withdraw the bill, make the payments under the Temporary Wheat Reserves Act, leave everything the way it was, and blame members in the opposition parties for preventing the farmers from getting acreage payments.

In case the minister has not heard it, I wish to point out that last May and June, and at other times during the summer, a number of Liberal members were saying that the opposition parties were delaying, obstructing and filibustering. In fact, I think it would be fair to say that the minister himself also said that. If the minister is right, and