

Grain—Deficiency Payments

who have come here from time to time dealing with this problem. We have listened to their arguments. We have studied those arguments. We have prepared quite a bit of material from time to time in attempting to analyse this particular problem to ascertain if there was a satisfactory solution.

I can understand the impatience of people in western Canada anxious to get a reply to this particular question. There is a general impatience when problems like this are raised, and that impatience has been whipped up a bit by people like the hon. member for Assiniboia. But you will notice, Mr. Speaker, that tonight the authentic voice of western Canada was heard in the able speeches delivered by members like the hon. member for Acadia (Mr. Horner), the hon. member for Medicine Hat (Mr. Brunsdon) and the hon. member for Rosthern (Mr. Nasserden). These hon. members from western Canada do not get the opportunity from day to day that is afforded to the hon. member for Assiniboia who, by virtue of the fact he represents a group in this house, gains the floor on almost every occasion and can pose questions to the government every day. This is a special privilege which is accorded to him by virtue of his position in this house, and by his chance survival last March 31.

But these other members, the three of them who have spoken tonight, are people with as much experience as the hon. member for Assiniboia, with as much knowledge of the problems of western agriculture, with as much sympathy for those problems as the hon. member indicates in this house. They have given very reasoned statements with regard to the problem and have not attempted to whip up any emotional response.

We have been considering sympathetically this particular problem. Last January when representatives of farmers' organizations were here in Ottawa I recall saying to them on the subject of deficiency payments, why do you come to the government and ask for this without yourselves doing some of the hard work? Why do you not give us some figure with which to work? What are you talking about? I recall saying to them, are you talking about \$50 million or \$150 million? Have you any plan of your own? Subsequently, they got to work and produced some figures. We, in our turn, have examined those, and generally there has been a useful consideration of this problem.

But I noticed with regard to those who are advocating deficiency payments that they have not given attention to some of the factors that should have been considered. In the first instance, the idea of deficiency payments originated not on this continent but in the United Kingdom and in Europe. In eight

[Mr. Churchill.]

or nine countries situated across the Atlantic deficiency payments have been given to the growers of wheat for a number of years. The deficiency payments have been used as an incentive to production because those countries, with the exception of France on occasion—I am speaking now of the United Kingdom, Belgium, the Netherlands, West Germany and so on—did not produce a sufficient amount of wheat for their own use each year. Consequently they have endeavoured to stimulate that production by deficiency payments. It is an entirely different thing when you talk about deficiency payments in a country like Canada, which is one of the great exporters of wheat, the country that supplies those areas in Europe with a great part of the wheat that they need. It seems to me it is quite wrong to lift from a country in Europe which does not produce sufficient for its needs a plan such as deficiency payments and transport it over here to a country where that incentive to production is not required.

That is one point which was not considered by those who made presentations to us last year, and my hon. friend from Assiniboia in his argument tonight said nothing about certain other factors which should be considered. If you are going to discuss deficiency payments on the production of wheat you have to take into account increasing yields which have occurred over the years; you have to take into account more efficient production techniques, the decreasing number of farms and the effect of the size of farms upon the profitability of operation.

When you look at the farm picture in western Canada closely you find, as I believe my hon. friend from Medicine Hat pointed out tonight, that some farms are able to produce wheat at a profit but you also discover that perhaps some 50 per cent of the smaller farms, some of which are on unproductive land, are not able to do so. Hence, you get a demand for deficiency payments to take up the slack. It is a problem which is large in extent but whether or not deficiency payments are going to be made I am not in a position to state tonight.

I would however point out to those who have spoken on this subject that we are giving very active consideration to it. I hope there will be an answer before many more days have gone by and that answer will not be in response to any pressure exerted upon us in recent days or any threat, such as my hon. friend from Assiniboia has made on several occasions of some march on Ottawa by the people of western Canada.

Mr. Argue: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order. I know the minister wants to be fair and I think he will accept my word when