

To the extent that the western farmer can find good markets and good prices for his products, his eastern counterpart can also have fine markets for his.

In any event, Mr. Speaker, I will continue to support, along with my colleagues, the government in the policy it is now putting forward, because in the absence of a better policy, I recognize that this one, though not perfect, at least proves that we are trying.

When we count the number of opposition members who are in the House tonight, we see that those members who charged us so often with not doing anything are not even here to take part in the debate. They are probably out west harvesting crops, which I think they had permission for.

In concluding, Mr. Speaker, I would like to remind hon. members that legislations are now being proposed. They have already been introduced in the House, and if the opposition wants to give us proof that it is willing to cooperate, we will see to it that they are placed on the orders of the day as soon as possible. I am sure that the minister, if supported by hon. members, would obtain that these bills be discussed tomorrow, in order to pass Bill C-244 and enable western farmers to receive as quickly as possible the monies which can be placed at their disposal.

Therefore, I reckon on the opposition's cooperation and I hope it will stop this filibustering which in my view is totally unwarranted.

[English]

Mr. Gordon Ritchie (Dauphin): Mr. Speaker, I must agree with this motion because the government has not followed the letter of the law in the payment of moneys under the Temporary Wheat Reserves Act to the Canadian Wheat Board. The action of the government in not making these moneys available to the Wheat Board in accordance with the law has created grave financial hardship for our farmers in western Canada. The minister expressed it so aptly when he said that he owed a tremendous debt. He owes that debt to the western farmers.

The government has shown complete disregard for the needs of western farmers in their time of adversity. In the finance committee we are now rushing through a bill providing \$80 million in grants to manufacturing industries which may be affected by the American surtax. At the most, the U.S. action represents \$300 million in surtax, whereas western farmers, with a much smaller population base, have seen their income diminish in real terms by about \$600 million during the past three years.

I have no quarrel with the swift passage of the employment support bill in face of the American action, but it would seem more in keeping with a government that pretends to be national in scope had the provisions of the Temporary Wheat Reserves Act been followed or alternatively, had the \$100 million promised by the minister in charge of the Wheat Board been paid out. Surely this is one time the minister could have talked to his cabinet colleagues, got them to see the inequity of the situation and persuaded them to carry out the proper course of action.

Withholding of Grain Payments

Evidence given before the agricultural committee indicated that in 1965-66 the value of grain marketing was approximately \$1,191 million; in 1966-67, \$1,417 million; in 1967-68, \$908 million; in 1968-69, \$742 million and in 1969-70, \$682 million. I have not seen the figures for 1970-71, but the minister's own admission it will be in the \$1 billion range. This alone represents a great loss of income for the prairie farmer and it is made worse when one considers it is for gross sales, not taking into account the fact that the cost of production has risen steadily over the years. Certainly, all the support mechanisms that have been built in for the prairie producers should have been used to their maximum.

• (10:50 p.m.)

The reason for this unhappy situation rests squarely on the shoulders of the minister and the government. The minister in charge of the Wheat Board, having decided in his wisdom that a new form of price stabilization should be embarked on for the prairie grains industry, brought forward in October of last year some papers which might be called a skimpy white paper to deal with the situation. But no legislation was brought down until the session was well on in in the spring—I believe April 29. The minister proposed to phase-out the Temporary Wheat Reserves Act and the Prairie Farm Assistance Act and in its place give out \$100 million. The minister had a joker in the deck, though; that was the complicated stabilization formula of a 2 per cent deduction on all grains in order to build up the fund.

However, the minister failed to get his legislation through the House though the \$100 million could well have been split off from the grain stabilization bill and paid out, and there would have been no opposition or questioning of this move. Instead, he chose to hold it over the summer and the payout will be some indefinite time in the future. When one considers that over \$70 million of the \$100 million would have been paid out to the producers long ago, the action of the government is inexcusable. It is like saying to a drowning man, "I will throw you a lifeline by and by, when I get around to it".

If the individual farmer was to receive the maximum benefit of this payout, it should have been made in the spring when he needed the money. The minister should impress upon his cabinet colleagues that the payment should be made in accordance with existing regulations and that the government should not renege on its legal obligation to pay the Wheat Board at the stated time. Only when the legislation is passed or the \$100 million paid out as promised should this turning over the moneys to the Wheat Board be discontinued. Why was this payment held back? With regard to the stabilization money, farmers are saying they would perhaps be better off to receive no money than to be bound into this plan.

The nature of the plan is such that the government can wash its hands of any substantial payment in the next five years. There is no possibility of having to pay more than \$20 million unless complete disaster strikes, because the limit will be so low. It is probably with this action in mind that the minister did not want to pay out \$100 million. He wanted to impose the 2 per cent deduction