

Prairie Grain Stabilization Act

Mr. Lang: That is not true.

Mr. Douglas: What this means is that the farmer will be levied 2 per cent on his grain sales, to go into the fund to provide assistance in any year when there is a catastrophic crop failure or a very serious and radical drop in farm income. The minister said this afternoon there is no limit to how much the government could lend the fund. That is true. But the farmer will then start to pay one-third of the cost of replenishing the fund. If the minister really wants to have an income stabilization plan, I am convinced that in the next day or two it is possible for this House to work out the kind of formula which would be acceptable to the farmers of western Canada and the governments of the prairie provinces.

If the minister does not like the wording of the motion or the amendment, surely it is not beyond the wit of his department to devise a formula under which there would be a factor dealing with farm costs. It is not difficult to work out a formula which would take into account the annual increase in farm production costs. Year after year Statistics Canada and the Department of Agriculture publish figures on farm production costs. The minister could put that factor into a formula. If he did that, much of the objection to this legislation would disappear. Why does the minister not do this? Is it because of mere stubborn arrogance?

Mr. Lang: It won't work.

Mr. Douglas: Is it because he is so surrounded with his own conceit that what he proposes is the only thing that can be done? The minister says it won't work.

Mr. Lang: Your amendments prove that.

Mr. Douglas: The minister says it won't work. If the minister is telling us it is not possible to put into a stabilization formula a factor which will provide for increased production costs, then he has no right to be occupying his present position. He ought to resign and go back to his ivory tower where he will not be faced with the practical problems of administering a grains program.

An hon. Member: I hope he doesn't go back to Saskatchewan.

Mr. Douglas: I suspect that the reason the minister has not been prepared to make these changes to the grains stabilization act is not because his officials cannot devise a formula, and not because he is not seized with the validity of the arguments put forward by farm organizations that net income, rather than gross income, ought to be the basis upon which stabilization payments are made. The real reason the minister is trying to force this legislation through the House is that this is part of the program which arises from the task force on agriculture and the farm adjustment resources mobility plan, which envisage getting off the farm those farmers who are described by the task force as being inefficient. It is designed to get farmers out of wheat growing because they will be much worse off under this legislation.

It may be that under this legislation, with gross income from the six grains enumerated in the legislation, they will remain at a fairly good level. But farm wheat deliveries could be low. Yet out of the few deliveries the farmer is

[Mr. Douglas.]

able to make he will have to pay the storage which is now being paid under the Temporary Wheat Reserves Act. The wheat farmer will be the worse off. The government wants farmers to get out of wheat growing. I concede that under the farm adjustment resources mobility plan, the government does not propose to leave them negligently alone. According to the government's statement, it proposes to take them into the minister's Department of Manpower and train them as electricians, plumbers and welders so they can go into the cities and join the other unemployed electricians, plumbers and welders.

That is the plan and purpose of the grain stabilization act. It is to reduce the commitment this government is making to support the western wheat grower. The government is seeking to cut its losses and to put the screws on so that only large farmers will survive and this stabilization plan will come into effect only in a year of catastrophe. We could go through an entire decade without a dollar having been paid out of that fund to the farmers of western Canada. I think unless the minister is prepared to amend the formula upon which grains stabilization payments will be made, this legislation constitutes a retrogressive step.

The minister is now making the threat that if this legislation is not passed promptly he proposes to withdraw it. Speaking only for myself, may I say that I do not scare worth a damn. I say to the minister that as this legislation now stands, it proposes to fasten upon the farmers of western Canada a rigid framework of poverty and I am opposed to it. I do not care whether the minister forces it through the House or withdraws it, I will make no apology for opposing the legislation.

• (8:40 p.m.)

I am prepared to go across the Prairies with the minister any time and discuss this legislation. I am prepared to go into the minister's constituency and discuss this legislation. I am prepared to abide by the decision of the farmers of western Canada when they have a chance to go to the polls and say what they think of this legislation, because up until now, despite all the propaganda of the minister, his colleague the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Olson) and the fictitious and misleading figures of the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau), they have not yet been able to convince the farmers that the legislation is not harmful to their best interests. I for one am prepared in the final analysis to leave that decision to the farmers of western Canada.

Mr. John Burton (Regina East): Mr. Speaker, the debate on the motion and the amendment now before us must be cast within the framework of a rather ominous shadow. That shadow takes the shape of one of the worst double-crosses western Canada has ever seen. I suggest that the minister in charge of the Wheat Board (Mr. Lang) is the person primarily responsible, at least on the evidence available to us at the present time. If he wants to tag anybody else within the government, that of course is up to him. But he is speaking for the government at the present time and the government is prepared to accept him as their spokesman.

Regardless of the little song and dance he tries to come up with, I think his record in the cabinet as a representative from the province of Saskatchewan is not one to be