

Crop Insurance Act

under the umbrella of the legislation which has resulted in a 100 per cent increase in the contracts issued between 1972 and 1973 and an increase in coverage from \$29 million in 1972 to \$139.8 million in 1973. However, while we welcome this legislation, I repeat what I said previously, namely, that it is legislation only to cover an emergency and unfortunately it is not indicative of an over-all policy on the part of the present government to develop an agricultural program.

A farmer taking out crop insurance can be compared to a merchant taking out fire insurance on his stock-in-trade. It keeps him from going into bankruptcy in the event of a catastrophe. The taking out of fire insurance does not ensure that his business will prosper. In order for his business to prosper he must have a policy that ensures that he will be able to sell his goods at reasonable prices and derive sufficient profit to make a living.

The case of the farmer is similar. The farmer can take out crop insurance to protect himself in the event of an emergency, but he must be in a position to sell the grain and livestock that he produces in order to realize a reasonable profit. The marketing of grain over the past number of years has been in the hands of the Canadian Wheat Board, and therefore the farmer is dependent upon the government to develop a policy of marketing. It is important that the policy take into consideration, not only the short-term but the long-term variables in the market.

Unfortunately, the present government does not seem to have any agricultural policy which would create stability so far as agriculture is concerned. In fact, I question whether it has a policy at all. First of all, we have a situation where the authority with respect to agriculture is divided between the Minister of Agriculture, the minister in charge of the Wheat Board (Mr. Lang), and the Minister of Regional Economic Expansion (Mr. Jamieson). I suggest that until such time as agriculture is dealt with by one minister, we cannot have a co-ordinated policy. What we have at present reminds me of a three-horse team with each horse pulling in a different direction.

First of all, the minister in charge of the Canadian Wheat Board forced the farmer to embark on what was called the Lift program. He not only encouraged but forced farmers to reduce their wheat production in spite of the fact that indicators in the world situation pointed to the fact that there would be a shortage of food in the immediate future. Having cut back on production through fire sales of wheat, the government completely reversed its policy. As a result, the government and the Canadian Wheat Board asked farmers to produce the maximum amount of grain in 1973. In the meantime, due to fire sales of wheat and long-term contracts, farmers have found themselves in the position of having the grain that they have produced being delivered at a very low price at a time when export prices are very high, and they will not receive the benefit of the high world prices, at least not in the 1972-73 crop year, and it is unlikely that they will do so in the 1973-74 crop year.

● (1720)

The same minister who involved the farmers in LIFT earlier in the spring promised a feed grains policy which would be equitable to all grain producers and livestock

[Mr. Neil (Moose Jaw).]

producers in Canada. But the policy was not announced until August and has led to considerable confusion in the minds of many of the western farmers and of the livestock producers throughout Canada, primarily because the minister in charge of the Wheat Board and the Minister of Agriculture have not seen fit to explain the policy fully.

Last week the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) announced a domestic wheat policy. But what has happened to it? Was it really a policy? In three days the minister in charge of the Wheat Board increased the subsidy from \$1.25 to \$1.75. It appears to me that the agricultural policy of the government is a panic policy. It is time the government, in consultation with provincial ministers of agriculture, farm organizations and farmers developed a comprehensive, long-term policy for agriculture, a policy that will give stability to our agricultural economy.

While we welcome this legislation, Mr. Speaker, and intend to give it speedy passage, it should be made clear that we consider it as legislation for emergency situations only. We do not consider it legislation which is part of an agricultural policy, simply because for this government no agricultural policy exists.

Mr. A. P. Gleave (Saskatoon-Biggar): Mr. Speaker, I had thought that the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Whelan), who is in his seat in the House, would have had something to say about agriculture on this occasion. We have been trying, without too much success, to get the Minister of Agriculture or the minister in charge of the Wheat Board (Mr. Lang) to make some clearcut statements on their policy. We have been trying to do that ever since the House reconvened to deal with the railway strike. Indeed, we asked them to do so before the House recessed for the summer. But again today the Minister of Agriculture has not seen fit to do so.

Recently, the Minister of Agriculture went to Toronto and talked to the mushroom growers. He tore strips off both parties on this side of the House. He could go to Toronto and recite the failings which he chose to attribute to us, but he cannot come into this House and say what the government is going to do. He could not rise from his seat this afternoon and tell us in detail his policies for agriculture.

This afternoon we are talking about a crop insurance bill. My party is wholeheartedly in support of the changes it proposes. So far as I know, the party to my right is also in favour of the bill, even though the minister says it is not. Crop insurance and improvements to the crop insurance program are all excellent. But what about income? I received a letter from the minister the other day. I had written to him asking him to foretell the future of the sheep industry in Canada, particularly in western Canada. There are people in my constituency who put money into the sheep industry. He said in reply that the support price program the government had for wool has failed. If I remember his words correctly, he said it did not serve its purpose. It is no wonder the program did not serve its purpose; the government did away with it. People who put money into raising sheep in my constituency are so disgusted that they are getting ready to quit. That is the situation in Saskatchewan. I do not know what it is in the rest of the country. The wool growers talked to my party, and we know they are a very discouraged group of people.