

Withholding of Grain Payments

or ministers of the Crown in this Parliament discharge the responsibilities which have been laid on them by Parliament and which go back as far as 1956.

During the summer recess I met farmers in my constituency who were concerned about this matter. They wired the minister responsible for the Wheat Board (Mr. Lang) and the Minister of Finance (Mr. Benson), asking for action in this matter. They did not receive satisfaction. So it has become necessary in this House to seek a remedy for the abuse of privilege which the government has exercised. The hon. member for Regina East (Mr. Burton), seconded by myself, moved the adjournment of the House in order that the government might make—

—the payments to the Canadian Wheat Board specified in the Temporary Wheat Reserves Act of 1956, so that an immediate improvement can be made in the economic position of western farmers.

In seeking justice under this act we seek justice for the western farmer. That justice must be sought in this House by members of the House no matter what party they represent. I say to hon. members: If you fail to carry out the provisions of a piece of legislation which has been enacted in this House you will provide the basis for another segment of society to do the same thing tomorrow.

We could raise all sorts of arguments as to why these payments should be made to the Canadian Wheat Board, and from there to the western wheat farmer. A few days ago in this House I quoted figures put out by the president of the Alberta Wheat Pool, to show that the income of the western farmer has declined by 44 per cent and that the western farmer is lagging far behind in income and standard of living. Apart from the legal aspects of government action, or lack of action, the figures show that there is a callous disregard of the income situation which faces western farmers at this juncture of our history. It is within the context of the situation facing the western farmer that the enormity of the action of the federal government ought to be judged.

• (8:30 p.m.)

If the government were looking at an industry that was booming and wealthy, maybe then they could find some justification for the action they have taken. However, this is not what the government is looking at. They are looking at an industry that is in difficult circumstances. They have worked out a program that they hope will get them off the hook. In order to get them off the hook completely they are going to make it retroactive to 1970 so that they can save some money which legitimately they should have paid. According to the evidence given to the Standing Committee on Agriculture, this amounts to approximately \$60 million. The figure, based on the payment to the farmers out of the last pool, would have been somewhere between 9 and 10 cents a bushel.

The government persisted in this approach despite the fact that the surcharge the United States put on certain products entering that country from Canada will aggravate an already difficult situation. They persist in this approach at a time when we are going to face increasingly tough competition overseas. The government is persisting in reducing the support which the western farmer now needs for entering export markets.

According to an article in the September 9 edition of the *Western Producer*, with the exception of wheat all grains which we are selling on export markets have declined compared to this time last year. Rapeseed is \$2.22½ compared to \$2.29½ a year ago, rye is 88-7/8 cents compared to \$1.09-1/4 a year ago, flax is \$2.30-5/8 compared to \$2.71-3/4 a year ago, barley is \$1.03-3/4 compared to \$1.19-3/8 a year ago, oats are 66-3/8 cents compared to 88-7/8 cents a year ago. The price of wheat is slightly higher, \$1.73-5/8 compared to \$1.70-5/8 a year ago.

It is in these circumstances that the minister and the government have persisted in their attitude toward the western farmer. It is in these circumstances that the government finds \$85 million to assist industry in central Canada. Primarily, that assistance will go to central Canada. The government has set up a program and a pattern which, like the law of the Medes and the Persians, cannot be altered; it is sacrosanct.

The best advice that can be given this evening to the minister responsible for the Wheat Board is that he reconsider Bill C-224. He should consider a real program for the grains industry in Canada that will enable it to survive and be a viable industry. But no, I expect he will defend what is essentially an indefensible bill and continue to say that we must repeal, retroactively, the Temporary Wheat Reserves Act and save the government the money it should have paid to the farmers under that act. I expect the minister to say that the government will repeal the PFAA, which has been of considerable assistance to farmers, so they can slough off western farmers every day of every year.

If the minister had come into this House with a program to replace or improve the Temporary Wheat Reserves Act, it would have been examined. It could have been seriously considered by this House. But no, he wants to dump the total cost of the storage on the farmer and give him no assistance this year, despite the fact that the grain in that pipeline not only benefits the farmer but those who haul and load it. It benefits the whole economy of western Canada.

When the stabilization bill was questioned, the minister accused those on this side of the House of filibustering it. This first occurred in May when the bill had barely come to the floor of this House. The other day I asked him a question about this matter and he again said that those who chose to question him were filibustering the bill.

The minister brought in a bill of such doubtful value that all the farm organizations in western Canada which appeared before the standing committee called the bill into question and condemned it. We questioned representatives of the Canadian Wheat Board and the Canada Grains Council. We asked questions about how this bill would work. We asked what these payments were based upon, and figures were put before the committee to show how they were arrived at. We asked representatives of the grain co-operatives whether we could operate effectively without adequate amounts of grain in storage. The answer was no, we could not. In spite of all this, the minister plowed ahead. We asked him how the stabilization aspects of the bill would apply to co-operatives, partnerships and corporations which are now becoming common among farmers in western Canada. He did not have the answers, Mr. Speaker. Then he has the gall to