

Prairie Grain Stabilization Act

up of 3, 4, 5 or even 10 large companies. It is made up of some 200,000 individuals who are holders of Wheat Board permits.

Under this program a large percentage of these people, perhaps between 10 and 20 per cent, may face disaster in any year without help of any kind. It would be much better if a formula were worked out under which net farm income were taken into consideration rather than gross farm income.

Mr. John Burton (Regina East): Mr. Speaker, the amendment we are discussing goes to the core of the debate on this bill. The measure before us is entitled the grain stabilization bill. It proposes a plan to which all prairie farmers must subscribe. I believe there would be general agreement as to the desirability of providing for stabilization at an adequate level, in favour of a plan which would bring stability to the prairie grain farmer. But in the bill now before us we are dealing not just with the principle involved, not with certain broad guidelines within which the government or its agencies can operate, but with a specific type of plan, one which has been proposed by the government. I am not critical in that respect. The fact that it is so specific at least enables us to pass adequate judgment on its probable effectiveness.

It would seem to me that by now the government, and especially the minister in charge of the Wheat Board (Mr. Lang), would have got the message—that the plan proposed in this bill is inadequate, that it will not do what its proponents claim for it. Thus, we need to give serious consideration to these amendments which propose the inclusion of a provision which would cover increasing costs of production, one of the critical factors facing farmers in their day to day operations. Every day the farmer has to keep in mind that his costs of production may rise. The income he was receiving yesterday may not be adequate today or tomorrow.

I am amazed that after all the consideration this bill has received, after all the issues which have been placed before members of the House and others in this country, the minister in charge of the Wheat Board should have replied as he did to a question addressed to him this afternoon. During the question period he was asked whether he would give consideration to representations from three prairie Ministers of Agriculture. It is public knowledge that the three ministers intend to make representations concerning the bill. A good deal of publicity was given to this fact yesterday. They made it clear they were unhappy with the bill and feel it is not good enough to meet the needs of prairie grain farmers.

What happened this afternoon when the minister was asked whether he would give consideration to their representations? The minister assured the House that he would listen to the representations made by these gentlemen and would take them into consideration. But when it came to a question of adjourning this debate at the report stage and on the amendments now before us, the government and its supporters lined up solidly against a proposal which would have meant deferring final judgment on the bill until such time as these provincial ministers have the opportunity to make their views known to the government.

• (9:40 p.m.)

If the minister is not going to listen to the three prairie governments or to the members of this House who have made their views known, who is he going to listen to? It seems to me he has displayed during this debate the attitude that he knows best for the farmers of western Canada, that he and he alone knows best what is good for western agriculture.

I think we have to keep in mind that the three prairie governments, particularly the government of Manitoba, have already made their views known. I am sure the minister will acknowledge that they made representations to the federal government which were directly related to the subject matter of these motions. The present clause as worded relates to grain sale proceeds that are gross grain sale proceeds. Motion No. 1 proposes to insert certain factors regarding costs of production. When these two factors are put together, what we are then talking about is the net income of farmers. We are talking about what the farmer is left with after paying his costs of production. Thus, I think we have to remember when discussing the representations that have been made by the three prairie provinces that the Manitoba government in particular presented a plan to the federal government proposing a type of stabilization based on the net income of prairie grain farmers.

My colleague from Regina-Lake Centre (Mr. Benjamin) has pointed out to the minister that we have never received a critique from the minister or from anybody else of the proposed Manitoba plan. If there are points of criticism or of weakness to be made about that plan, then I think all of us would want to hear what they are. But never have we heard from the minister what are his views or observations on the plan that has been presented.

How can we carry on a sensible discussion of this subject, one so vital and critical to the prairie farmers, when the minister does not respond to a degree greater than has been the case up to now? The fact is that he has given no indication of where he stands on the proposals that have been made. He talks about wanting to give consideration to various viewpoints and to any representations that are made, yet he turns a silent "thumbs down" to any proposal that conflicts in any way with the fancy little plan that he is attempting to foist on the farmers of western Canada.

Whenever the minister talks about this plan he has much to say about any proposal regarding changes to the plan which involve the expenditure of more money. This is true in part. There is no question that one of our basic criticisms of the bill is that we consider the federal treasury has made an inadequate allocation of federal resources to the prairie grains industry. The minister has to remember that criticism because he will be reminded of it many times during the coming months; and it will be the regret of the Liberal party if they show no change of heart, if I can use that phrase. I said it is only true in part that it is a question of more money. There is another basic point that has been raised, and this is the equitable treatment of farmers in western Canada, treatment that is based on need as it exists. That basic point the minister has totally ignored in considering this bill.