

Crop Insurance Act

May 14. I go along with that suggestion. Success will depend upon the response of all the people involved.

Some people have asked me about the basis of selection of the members of the commission. You know them: Mr. Annis, Mr. Campbell and Mr. St. Laurent. Some have suggested that these men are not from the textile industry. I have said in reply that this was part of the deal. We did not want employers in the textile industry unions or importers to be formally represented on the Board. What were the main qualifications of the three gentlemen selected? I have stated that the most important criterion was judgment, because it seemed to me this was the most useful attribute.

I am sure we will debate these matters in detail at the committee stage.

Motion agreed to, bill read the second time and referred to the Standing Committee on Finance, Trade and Economic Affairs.

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• (4:30 p.m.)

CROP INSURANCE ACT**AMENDMENT TO INCREASE EXTENDED COVERAGE**

The House resumed, from Friday, January 15, consideration of the motion of Mr. Olson that Bill C-185, to amend the Crop Insurance Act, be read the second time and referred to the Standing Committee on Agriculture:

Mr. R. R. Southam (Qu'Appelle-Moose Mountain): Mr. Speaker, I have not spoken previously on this bill because I wished to read the extensive debate which took place on January 15. I believe there are one or two very valid points which have been mentioned in this debate which should be re-emphasized. As we know, this bill deals with just one modest amendment to the present Crop Insurance Act. It deals particularly with the flooding of land, cultivating and fertilizing of land, and the planting or seeding of a crop in areas where certain crop damages have occurred in recent years. My remarks shall be very brief because, as I said a moment ago, other hon. members, such as the hon. member for Mackenzie (Mr. Korchinski), the hon. member for Meadow Lake (Mr. Cadieu), and the hon. member for Dauphin (Mr. Ritchie), have dealt with this bill as it relates to their particular areas.

The bill is interesting, not so much because of the subject matter it deals with, but because of what it lacks. I wish to refer for a moment to the original crop insurance legislation which was introduced in 1959. It is understandable that this piece of legislation still lacks a good deal because this was the first time we had a crop insurance plan for Canadian agriculture. At that time, the problem was not knowing where to begin, where to end or what would be practical in terms of legislation. Now, however, there has been a reasonable time lapse and a number of inadequacies are apparent in this legislation.

I recall that in 1959-60 the Province of Manitoba took the initiative and introduced legislation to complement

[Mr. Pepin.]

the federal legislation because that legislation was only enabling legislation and the main responsibility for effective crop insurance still lies with the provinces. Manitoba was in the forefront and other provinces followed. At that time I was rather discouraged to see Saskatchewan dragging its heels. I can recall, directly and indirectly through newspaper comments and so on, having discussions with the hon. member who was then the Premier of Saskatchewan and now the hon. member for Nanaimo-Cowichan-The Islands (Mr. Douglas) about the fact that Saskatchewan apparently was dragging its heels. However, I believe Saskatchewan has co-operated very well in an effort to bring in a comprehensive crop insurance scheme to meet the potential of the present federal legislation.

One of my worries, and one of the reasons I rise to speak at this time, is that in looking at the figures I find that only about 15 per cent of the people actively engaged in agriculture utilize the crop insurance plan. What is the reason? In my opinion, the reason would seem to be that the plan falls short of what it should be. It would be logical to conclude that the present crop insurance plan is inadequate for the purpose for which it was originally developed.

For a moment I should like to refer to certain recommendations made by the task force on agriculture. The recommendation reads:

In 1975 a Federal-provincial committee should appoint an independent body to make a comprehensive evaluation of the effectiveness and efficiency of the crop insurance program and, in particular, to recommend on whether or not the current subsidy should be continued.

This is an indication that the members of the task force were concerned about the present legislation. I do not agree with the time at which they suggest such action should be taken. At another point, the report suggests the immediate discontinuance of the PFAA program. I cannot agree with this because the PFAA, since it was introduced, has filled a very great need and has been very effective in many areas in which crop insurance could not apply. I say that, for the moment, we should not consider taking any action to do away with the PFAA program until we have a more effective crop insurance program. In saying this I believe I speak on behalf of a great many farmers in western Canada. I think they would support this contention.

Further on the task force report reads:

The equivalent of the annual subsidy paid to the PFAA program by the federal government should be allocated to the financing of the Prairie Grain Price Stabilization Program.

I cannot agree with this suggestion, either. This is another example of the present government trying to rob Peter to pay Paul. I refer to these matters because they tie into the present discussion in respect of crop insurance.

In conclusion, may I say my first reason for rising at this time to take part in the debate is to re-emphasize what I and others have said. The legislation is not being utilized to anything like its maximum potential. Because of this, I suggest that the government should set up a