

Withholding of Grain Payments

Wheat Reserves Act was going to become far less important to the farmer in the future because we were not going to allow wheat to block the elevator system to the extent that grain could not effectively be moved to market. Moving the grain to market is the prime function of the handling system, not being blocked with grain. That is why—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Yorkton-Melville (Mr. Nystrom).

Mr. Nystrom: I wonder if the hon. Minister would answer a question at this time, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Lang: Mr. Speaker, I have some confidence that at the rate I am going I will answer all his questions before I am finished.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Is that a commitment?

Mr. Lang: It is because of our belief that the handling and transportation system must be allowed to get grain to market that we must be prepared for a maximum year. We cannot afford to have one bushel of grain standing in the way of the rapid movement of grain. Because of that, for the first time in a long period farmers in the prairie region found this year that they were able to deliver a little bit of grain once again from their combines to the elevators at harvest time instead of finding the system plugged with grain on August 1. I would like to explain to members from other parts of Canada what a nonsensical system that was. We used to find the elevators plugged with grain on August 1. Farmers would have a great crop ready to be harvested in the month of September and the elevator system would be plugged so that not an additional bushel of grain could be added. We said that there had to be some sensible approach to inventory. In saying that, in the Lift program we added \$60 million to the income of the prairie farmer to help him make an adjustment to his inventory.

That was not an easy program, Mr. Speaker, and my advisers told me to take another year or two before doing that. I said that we could not wait, that we had to get our handling system into shape and supplies of grain into the proper place as rapidly as possible because of the tremendous need to get additional income into the hands of the prairie farmer. I told my advisers that there are only two places where the prairie farmer who sells his grain is going to get his income; one is from his sales and the other is from the Treasury. I said that try as any of us might, there is a finite and very real limit to what can be obtained for the prairie farmer from the Treasury at any time and that, therefore, the tremendous drive must be to sell more grain, to get our grain out into the world.

I am sorry to take so long, Mr. Speaker, and I pray the indulgence of all hon. members, but I should like to say a few words about why the Temporary Wheat Reserves Act was therefore going to be worth so much less. Just by getting a little reduction of wheat in the system, a little space in the system, just by making a little room for rapeseed which was becoming a very important crop and

[Mr. Lang.]

just by making a little room for barley which we said we had to market into the world, this year the Temporary Wheat Reserves Act would have dropped in value to only \$26 million and by next year the amount would have been very insignificant indeed. Against that we built in these commitments without limit—a commitment, I say to the hon. member for Timiskaming without limit—to 4 per cent of the 90 per cent of the crops marketed by the prairie farmer, into the stabilization fund to be paid out to the farmer in those years when he has his greatest difficulty. With regard to the bill that has been in the House and before the committee, I find that I owe a tremendous debt—

• (9:40 p.m.)

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

An hon. Member: Pay up, Otto, pay up.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Lang: —of gratitude to my colleagues on the Liberal side of the House who represent constituencies in the Maritimes, Ontario, Quebec, British Columbia as well as members from the prairie provinces. I am thinking particularly of those members from parts of the country other than the prairies, who sat through the irrelevancies of hon. members opposite in the House and in committee and who helped to get this bill to its present stage, the report stage. I thank them on behalf of the prairie farmers. I want to say to them that I will try to inform the prairie farmer of the efforts made on his behalf, of the attitude they have expressed towards his problem and of the growing understanding that they are helping to bring across this country regarding the real problems of the prairie farmer.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order please. The hon. member for Wellington has risen, I think, to ask a question. Other hon. members wish to be recognized. I will recognize first the hon. member. May I remind all hon. members in the chamber that the minister, of course, will have to indicate whether or not he is prepared to answer questions. That being so, I will recognize the hon. member for Wellington.

Mr. Hales: Mr. Speaker, I wish to ask the minister a question, if he will answer. Is he agreeable?

Mr. Lang: Yes.

Mr. Hales: I am not a prairie farmer but I wish to ask the minister this question. Does he not agree that legislation passed by this House and on the statute books of Canada should be enforced until such time as it is amended or repealed by other legislation?

Mr. Lambert (Edmonton West): That is the question.

Mr. Lang: Mr. Speaker, that is an easy, general question to answer in the affirmative. In this particular case, having announced the government's policy of repealing the Temporary Wheat Reserves Act effective July 31,