

Prairie Grain Stabilization Act

real way the stabilization of farm income in the future so that the farmers can plan and make decisions themselves in order that their farms may be more efficiently operated. Farmers are efficient. Farming, as an industry, is perhaps the most efficient industry in this country. What the farmers need is the right to participate in decisions affecting their own lives. All they are really asking for is a say in these decisions, that they not be made by the bureaucrats for them but by them in their own interest. I do not think the farmers are overly greedy. They are just asking for a fair deal.

There are many other aspects of this bill towards which these amendments are directed and with which we must be concerned. One thing which has been mentioned is that the bill is to be applicable right across the Prairies in a uniform way and would not take into account what may be special circumstances in certain areas. There might be a crop failure around Yorkton, in the Peace River country or in the north because of drought or because of the Bertha army worm or some such thing. The income of the farmers in these areas may be well below the average, but because conditions have been very good across the rest of the Prairies they do not qualify to receive funds from the stabilization plan. This is the type of thing that has to be changed if this plan is to be meaningful to most of the farmers in western Canada.

• (3:50 p.m.)

Now, I wish the minister would take into consideration some of the things that we have been speaking about in this debate, but even more important—it does not matter that much that he listen to us—I wish he would listen to farm organizations who have the expertise and first-hand knowledge on all these issues. All we ask is that he listen to the farmers themselves. This to me, as I said before, seems to be a natural extension of democracy, a thing we should be doing in this House. Instead, we are getting further and further away from the people. I am sure that if the Liberal members of this House, as was pointed out last night, were to go out to the Prairies and talk to the farmers they would come back and say the same things we are saying, that farmers do not want this bill as it is.

I would like to ask in a very serious way that members, such as the hon. member for Portage (Mr. Cobbe), rise and speak in the House. I am sure that he knows the reaction of farmers to this bill. The hon. member for Provencher (Mr. Smerchanski) and several other members of this House should be in this debate also, but they are not. I wonder why? My suspicion is that they know what farmers think of this bill and because of that they do not want to participate in this debate.

I should like to mention one or two other matters before I sit down. All hon. members who know something about agriculture should rise and speak on some of the more important aspects of this bill, such as the need to include cost of production as a factor in working out a stabilization plan. In addition, rather than basing a stabilization plan on gross income, it should be based on net income because the farmer's gross income depends on the type of farm, the year, and other circumstances beyond his control. It is very deceiving at times because one may deduce from what a farmer has physically that he is a very wealthy man, but this is often not the case. There are

[Mr. Nystrom.]

intangibles, as I said, to be considered such as weather conditions, drought, insects such as the Bertha army worm in rapeseed fields, and so on. These factors must be taken into consideration by the minister if the plan is to be meaningful to farmers.

Last but not least, I hope that he will either delay this bill or agree with us to adjourn the debate until he has an opportunity to hear from the three prairie governments of Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta. If some changes are not made, in 20 years time there will possibly not be a rural prairie society left that is even recognizable because over two thirds of these people will probably not be on the farms. Communities which those farms support will become ghost towns, and many of them will disappear altogether. That is not what I want and that is not what farmers want. Farming communities should be preserved and encouraged by all of us, regardless of whether we come from large urban centres or from rural areas.

Once again I would ask the minister to seriously consider listening to the voice of the people and not quite as stubborn and adamant in what he thinks are his solutions to agricultural problems. I do not want to wait until the next federal election before the people make the decision. I would like the bill changed now. If it is not, it will be changed after the next election because the people will not tolerate such utter nonsense. With the Assiniboia by-election coming up, I hope that the minister will demonstrate to us some courage and show that he does come from the Prairies, that he knows the people and has sufficient sensitivity to listen to what they want. Then, he will either seriously amend the bill or withdraw it altogether to be reconsidered. In the meantime, let us send out the \$100 million and make those payments under the Temporary Wheat Reserves Act because this money belongs to the farmers. It is owing to them under the law of Canada, and it is payable every month. We should start paying it out now.

Mr. Speaker: Is the House ready for the question?

Mr. Doug Rowland (Selkirk): The two amendments to Bill C-244 which are before us, both of which stand in the name of my colleague the hon. member for Saskatoon-Biggan (Mr. Gleave), attempt to do three things. First, they attempt to have stabilization payments, if any, added to the value of the grain sold by the producer for the purpose of calculating gross proceeds from sales. This would, over a period of time, raise the amount of the five-year average of proceeds from grain sales and thus increase the number of farmers eligible to receive payments from the stabilization fund. In addition, there would be an increase in the amounts they would be eligible to receive in years of low grain income. That is a provision with which I should think all members in this chamber would be sympathetic.

The second thing the amendment attempts to do is, by removing the provision in the bill that stabilization payments be based on only 90 per cent of aggregate grain sale proceeds of all producers for the crop year under review and relating it only to 90 per cent of the five-year average of aggregate grain sales, to have the computation based upon the total figure for the crop in question and the full figure for the five-year average. In so doing, one of the glaring defects of the bill, that of providing for propor-