

CROP INSURANCE ACT

REIMBURSEMENT TO PROVINCES FOR PARTIAL ADVANCES ON CROP INSURANCE PREMIUMS

Hon. E. F. Whelan (Minister of Agriculture) moved that Bill C-129, to amend the Crop Insurance Act, as reported (without amendment) from the Standing Committee on Agriculture, be concurred in.

Motion agreed to.

Mr. Whelan moved that the bill be read the third time and do pass.

Mr. Doug Neil (Moose Jaw): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to have the opportunity to say a few words with respect to Bill C-129, to amend the Crop Insurance Act. On March 29 the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Whelan) moved that the bill be read a second time. There was a short debate which did not resume until April 18 when the bill was referred to the Standing Committee on Agriculture. The bill was considered in committee on Tuesday, June 5, and Thursday, June 7, and on the later date the bill was reported without amendment.

The bill was, and is, of considerable importance to all the provinces of Canada in that it provides for the payment of 50 per cent of the premiums paid on behalf of insured persons if no contribution is required from the federal government toward the administration expenses of the provincial plan.

● (1710)

The provinces were very anxious that the bill be passed in order that they be in a position to advertise the plan and to encourage farmers to participate in the program. Despite the fact that the opposition parties indicated that they would not delay third reading, this government did not consider that this bill should have top priority and parliament recessed toward the end of July without the bill having been placed on the order paper for third reading.

As a result, the governments of the three prairie provinces at least underwrote the premiums for the farmers on the assumption that this bill would be passed. I think they deserve credit for their action because the record of the present government is such that to underwrite such a program on the anticipation that the bill would be submitted for third reading and passed is like playing a long-shot at the horse races. The provinces at present are anxiously awaiting the passage of the bill as they are unable to prepare their program for 1974 until they know that the bill has been passed.

On several occasions subsequent to June 8 and prior to the summer recess, questions were put to the Minister of Agriculture to determine when the bill would be submitted to the House for third reading. Despite promises of the minister to bring the bill before the House for third reading, the House recessed without the bill having been considered. I had the privilege of attending in Calgary, as an observer, the western federal-provincial conference. The Minister of Agriculture was also in attendance. I could hardly believe my ears when the minister stated that the bill was delayed and not given third reading because of

Crop Insurance Act

the obstruction of the House leader of the official opposition.

Some hon. Members: Shame.

An hon. Member: Did you say that, Gene?

Mr. Whelan: I certainly did, and the record shows the facts.

Mr. Neil (Moose Jaw): The record is fairly clear on what transpired and I think it shows that this party and other opposition parties were prepared at all times.

Mr. Whelan: To give unanimous consent? That is not so, and you know it. You had many opportunities to do it.

An hon. Member: You wanted it passed without debate.

Mr. Whelan: I don't give a damn if you don't pass it. The farmers of Canada want it.

An hon. Member: All of a sudden he is the farmers' friend.

Mr. Neil (Moose Jaw): I think the minister has sufficient experience in the House to know that it is the government and not the opposition parties that decide what business comes before the House.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Neil (Moose Jaw): Furthermore, the opposition has no say in determining the order of business.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Neil (Moose Jaw): I think the record shows that this party at all times was prepared to give quick passage to the legislation on third reading, and that the delay in passing this bill rests squarely on the shoulders of the government.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Neil (Moose Jaw): I think it is important that we understand that the Crop Insurance Act is an act designed to offer the farmer protection against crop loss caused by natural hazards. It is a form of income stability in that it attempts to guarantee to the farmer a portion at least of the cost of production. It is a program that gives some protection to the grain producers on the Prairies. But I would like to point out that it is not a program that gives any protection or guarantee to the producer of livestock, and in this regard I would like to recommend to the minister that consideration be given to widening the program to assist those who are attempting to earn their livelihood from livestock production.

I think it is also important to understand that crop insurance legislation is simply legislation to protect the farmer in the event of an emergency situation. It is legislation which allows the provinces to develop their own plan of insurance with respect to hazards that are covered, the extent of the coverage and the determination of the premiums.

I can only speak for the province of Saskatchewan when I say that a reasonably good plan has been developed