

Withholding of Grain Payments

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Laniel): Order, please. Is the Minister of Manpower and Immigration (Mr. Lang) rising on a point of order?

Mr. Lang: Mr. Speaker, I just wanted you to note my difficulty in attempting to rise, having already spoken. But I would be glad, if I have general consent, to make a comment on the hon. member's challenge.

Mr. Thomson: Mr. Speaker, I am not going to take up all my time until a quarter to ten, and would be glad to hear the minister. May I just say something about Bill C-244. As a farmer, the bill will cost me \$300 a year, assuming that I am able to grow 10,000 bushels of grain a year. In a ten-year period I could have five more crops yet receive nothing from the bill, assuming that the crops and the income on the Prairies were adequate in that ten-year period and that no payment was made. We could use for example the Peace River area of British Columbia and Alberta, where they have had several poor crops and resultant low income. These people would be charged, but in the last three or four years they might not have received anything although the rest of the Prairies had a good income. That is the best example I can give.

• (9:30 p.m.)

The minister in charge of the Wheat Board complains because we do not give him credit for some of the good things he has done. I would be prepared to give him credit, but because he has done some useful things—

An hon. Member: Like what?

Mr. Thomson: —does not mean he has the right to force on us something that is unacceptable to the agricultural community. When the prairie governments, the farm organizations concerned and the Members of Parliament who know something about the problem all say it is not adequate, then I suggest to the minister that he should at least listen. I do not think he has.

Mr. Speaker, let me mention three or four items in the bill which I find objectionable and then I will be happy to listen to the minister.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Laniel): Order, please. Although the Chair has been quite lenient in this debate, I would hesitate to allow the hon. member to open up a debate on the details of Bill C-244 which is not before the House at this time. The Chair does not mind the hon. member referring to the bill and generally touching upon aspects of the bill related to his opposition to the existing legislation, but I would ask the hon. member not to open up a debate on the bill itself and certain provisions of the bill.

An hon. Member: Everybody else did.

An hon. Member: The minister did.

Mr. Thomson: Mr. Speaker, I am not going into detail on the bill; I just wanted to mention two or three points in passing. I am sure everyone else in this House has spoken in this context. I feel that this bill, related to the fact that the payment has not been made, has some objectionable features. Speaking as a farmer, I do not think it will work. That is why we on this side of the House have filibustered,

[Mr. Lang.]

if that is the right term. We have objected because we do not feel that the bill is an adequate solution to the problems.

In the first place, the bill is too expensive. For it to work adequately there would have to be an adequate crop insurance program. And it is not 2 per cent as the minister suggested; it will cost 4 per cent, 5 per cent or 6 per cent for an adequate crop insurance program. With agriculture in its present position, we cannot afford that. There is no cost of production feature in the bill, but I will not go into that question. It pays only on a complete Prairies basis. As I indicated earlier, it is a little like unemployment insurance being paid only when all Canada is suffering a depression, or all Ontario, or if the whole automobile industry is suffering unemployment. I am sure the Minister of Labour (Mr. Mackasey) can appreciate that. If a factory closes down the people in that factory receive unemployment insurance. That is not the way this bill will work. It will work only if all factories close down. It will work on a different principle. I am sure the Minister of Labour would not find it acceptable in industry. We as farmers find it unacceptable.

Mr. Speaker, I would like the minister to tell us which farm organizations support the principle and conditions inherent in this bill.

[Translation]

Mr. Marcel Roy (Laval): Mr. Speaker, I feel our debate of today has given us an opportunity of explaining to the Canadian people that our present government has really assumed its responsibilities and that the problem of agriculture has indeed been one of those given priority.

All kinds of unfounded accusations have been brought forward this afternoon. The hon. member for Témiscamingue (Mr. Caouette) has even taken advantage of the situation, Mr. Speaker, to tell us about the omnibus bill.

Many examples demonstrate how well the present government has assumed its responsibilities. I have here the report submitted on March 23, 1969 by the Standing Committee on Agriculture, which gave committee members the opportunity to travel specifically to consider the problems of western grain producers. We met more than 18,000 farmers in the western provinces, and we were made aware of their problems. It is certainly this proves that the government wants to know about the problems and solve them.

The bill now before us is one solution, in my opinion, and I believe that all the associations that appeared before the Standing Committee on Agriculture have agreed in principle on the merits of this legislation. I want to recall here that this committee held 19 meetings to consider Bill C-244. At those meetings, we heard all the associations that wanted to submit brief. I have here several members of the proceedings and evidence of that committee. During those sittings, the minister made constant appeals to the co-operation of all members, stressing the urgency of passing this legislation so that the Western farmers may get their due.

I have in hand the proceedings of June 15, in which can be seen in what terms the minister responsible for the Wheat Board (Mr. Lang) appealed to the committee members. I quote from page 26 of this report: