

Canadian Wheat Board Act (No. 2)

Mr. Arnold Peters (Timiskaming): Mr. Speaker, this is certainly a motherhood type of amendment. I am sure that everyone agrees that those who are involved directly should be represented. I think that is a fair position and one which everyone supports. However, there are other boards, for instance the board which was mentioned in another context by one of my colleagues from the province of Quebec. He indicated that producers have to be represented on these boards. I remember some of the representatives who were on the Ontario Milk Marketing Board, for example, who were retired farmers or retired milk producers. They sat on that board for a number of years with great distinction, and it seems to me that it is not really necessary for a representative to be an A class permit holder, but he must be someone who has the subject as his primary interest. I think even the hon. member for Mackenzie (Mr. Korchinski) would agree that most farmers would not vote for someone just because the government wants him or just because some other entity, such as the Caghill Grain Company, wants him, but that person is going to be elected because he will be able to do a good job.

It is a fact that there were elections for the advisory board, but those elections did not turn out exactly as planned. In fact, there were a number of people elected who were not anticipated to be members of the advisory board, and it may be that the Palliser grain growers did not really get the kind of representation they wanted. However, farmers are going to elect to that board those whom they think will do the best job for them. It may be some woman and she may be very involved and have a special knowledge of farming, although she may not hold the permit. Her husband could hold the permit, but I think if everyone in the community agreed that they wanted her to represent them it should be possible for her to do so. Many farmers are smart enough to know that the day comes when the farm should be turned over to the children. I think that will happen to the hon. member for Mackenzie (Mr. Korchinski). He has been a farmer for a long time and is familiar with all the problems. If he decides one of these days to turn all the A class permits of his operation over to his sons, then there really would not be much more for him to do and he might make an excellent representative on the advisory committee. He might make that representation in a better way as a retired farmer than he would as a farmer in the actual production.

● (1140)

An hon. Member: Or as a member of parliament!

Mr. Peters: My colleague says, maybe more than as a member of parliament. That may be true, but I think he would then have time to devote to the operation.

While this a motherhood motion and I am inclined to support it on that basis, I do believe that we are really talking about allowing the largest number of competent people to be on the list from which the farmers will make their choice. I have faith in the farmers to choose those representatives for the advisory committee who are going to make representation on their behalf in the best way possible. In my opinion, it may be that retired farmers are suitable.

Let us not kid ourselves, Mr. Speaker; there are honest people and partly dishonest people. It is a matter of degree.

But there is no question that most of the people we would like to get rid of turned over their A class permits when they could have held them on one section, and have met the requirements of a bona fide farmer or bona fide permit holder. That they saw fit, because they are in effect out of the operation, to surrender their permits does not mean they have given up their expertise, their ability or their knowledge of the subject and that they might not be the best representatives of the farmers on the advisory committee. I think there is considerable merit in letting the farmer make the choice himself.

Mr. Neil: It is the cabinet that makes the decision.

Mr. Peters: Mr. Speaker, it is said that the cabinet makes the decision. The cabinet always did make the decision. There were party hacks on the advisory committee, there is no doubt about that but I do not think that was true in the last election. I think the cabinet was as surprised as anybody else at some of those who were chosen.

If the farmers have faith in the ability of the advisory committee to advise the Wheat Board, then they will choose people who are going to represent them. It is a fact that they will be representing regions and representing various points of view. I am sure the Palliser Wheat Growers, who are very close to the minister, may not be a very good representative for many of the wheat producers in other areas, but in those areas representatives will be chosen to represent their point of view. That is the purpose of the advisory committee.

While I agree with the idea that producers must be involved, this amendment limits it to producers today, to people who have an A class permit. There are many producers who have retired and who have not lost their ability to provide representation. Indeed, in some cases they may have gained a much wider experience which could be of use to the producers. This could be so if we increase the number of people who can seek election.

So far as the House of Commons is concerned, anyone who meets the very basic requirement of age and certain moral standing can run for election. The public makes the decision in its own interests when it elects people to this House. I think that is the principle that could be extended to the advisory committee. The farmer is a very sophisticated voter and will make the selection in his own interests.

Mr. Gordon Towers (Red Deer): Mr. Speaker, in rising to speak for a few moments in support of the amendment I have to poke a few holes in the statements made by the hon. member for Regina-Lake Centre (Mr. Benjamin). As usual, he does not seem to have his facts straight.

He stated that a farmer's wife could not have a permit book. Mr. Speaker, that is not true. A farmer's wife can have a permit book and many of them do. It is a matter of whether they wish to have one or not and whether they own the land, whether they are renting it or leasing it or owning and operating it and making the decisions on it. There is, therefore, nothing to limit the individual who wishes to become a grain producer. All he needs are three basic fundamentals—either land which is leased, property which he owns or property which he operates. It is as simple as that, and certainly has nothing to do with the