

Canadian Wheat Board Act

Mr. Doug Rowland (Selkirk): Mr. Speaker, since the changes in this legislation are largely designed to reflect in the Canadian Wheat Board Act principles and changes that have already been brought forward in other legislation that has come before the House both in this session and in the previous session, I do not feel particularly moved to go over all the changes in great detail. Their substance has been debated at considerable length on other occasions.

When I mention that this is largely a housekeeping bill, I do so not in criticism of it but simply to explain why my remarks will be largely restricted to one topic. Before I get to that topic, may I mention in passing my approval of the provisions of this bill that allow for extension of the crop year under certain circumstances. I think this provision will meet with the universal approbation of the farming community.

What I do want to spend some time on are the provisions permitting the marketing under the Canadian Wheat Board Act of flax, rye and rapeseed. I am a little disturbed that, after three years in office, the government has not yet discovered a way to determine the will, in this area, of the farming community. I think it is necessary that we end speculation in the matter of pricing farm products if we are to bring any stability to the incomes of Canadian farmers. The bringing of flax, rye and rapeseed within the regulations of the Wheat Board will do this, in effect, for three very important commodities.

The legislation before the House, as the minister pointed out in his remarks, is only enabling legislation. He has left the House somewhat in doubt whether it will ever be employed and, if so, under what circumstances. The minister suggested to the House that there is no information yet available to him, and to the people who will be affected, to enable him to make a rational decision regarding bringing these grains within the control of the Canadian Wheat Board.

The three major pools, the National Farmers Union and the Federation of Agriculture have for some time been expressing their opinion that each of these grains should be marketed through the Wheat Board. This is a very substantial indication of opinion within the farming community. Indeed, short of a plebiscite I fail to see how the minister could expect to obtain a much more definitive indication of the will of the farming community.

I hope that when he brings this debate to a close the minister will give the House some more precise indication of the tactic that he intends to employ to determine the will of the people who produce these commodities, since the minister did indicate that he wanted such information before he finally decided whether to employ the power to market flax, rye and rapeseed under the Canadian Wheat Board Act.

If it is the intention of the minister, through this legislation, solely and simply to have a club to wave to overcome some of the major problems associated with the current system of marketing flax, rye and rapeseed, then he is not engaging in a particularly good legislative practice. Legislation is intended to be used. If we do not

intend to use it, other means are available to us to influence groups we want to influence. Simply putting legislation on the books to use as a weapon to ensure good behaviour is not a practice I should like to see followed in Canada.

We should like the minister to give the House an indication how he intends to obtain the opinions of the farming community as to the value of proclaiming this particular part of the bill; what procedures he intends to use to obtain either consent or denial; when he intends to attempt to obtain this consent or denial; and when we can expect a final statement from him indicating one way or the other whether he is going to use these provisions. It is very important that we obtain this information from the minister before the bill goes to committee so that commodity groups coming before the committee have some idea what they are talking about. As I say, I do not like the idea of leaving this whole section of the bill in limbo so that nobody knows just what is going to be done with it. Judging from his remarks this afternoon not even the minister knows. This kind of ambiguous situation should be ended as soon as possible, and I hope the minister will give us a clear indication of his intentions when he concludes this debate.

I think I need say nothing more than that, Mr. Speaker. We in this party have advocated for some years the inclusion of flax, rye and rapeseed within the regulations and that these be marketed by the Canadian Wheat Board. We hope that the minister's final decision will be to use these provisions which he has placed in the bill. We hope that this decision will be reached after consultation with the commodity groups concerned before the beginning of this crop year. I should like some assurance from the minister that he is moving rapidly in this direction and that he can expect to receive the information which he considers necessary for that decision before the beginning of this crop year.

• (4:30 p.m.)

Mr. Jack Murta (Lisgar): Mr. Speaker, in rising to speak to the amendments to the Canadian Wheat Board Act, I should like to say at the outset that until a few weeks ago I could have supported the general terms of these amendments proposed by the minister responsible for the Wheat Board. That was before these amendments included flax, rye and rapeseed. I cannot in any way, shape or form support this kind of an inclusion. By bringing flax, rye and especially rapeseed, under the jurisdiction of the Canadian Wheat Board, the government and the minister are completely disregarding the wants, the needs and the feelings of the majority of producers and others engaged in this segment of our agricultural industry.

I should like to say that over the past few years, with the exception of some years of crop failures in other parts of the world, the Wheat Board's handling of the grain industry has been incredibly inefficient. For the most part, attempts to sell our grain on the international market have not been aggressive enough. We have not been selling grain in world markets and the Wheat Board

[Mr. Downey.]