

Prairie Farm Assistance Act

Motion agreed to and bill read the first time.

Mr. Gardiner: By leave, I should like to move the second reading.

Mr. P. E. Wright (Melfort): Mr. Speaker, at this point I should like to say a few words with regard to the present bill and its implications so far as we in the northern part of Saskatchewan are concerned. The Prairie Farm Assistance Act was passed in 1939 to take care of a serious situation which had developed in western Canada during the 1930's. Since that time I believe some six amendments have been made to the act as the government found it necessary to make it more operative and more easily administered.

Up until 1950 the amendments were mostly to extend the act and make it more operative. In 1950 an amendment was passed, which we are now amending, with regard to a certain area in the northern parts of Alberta and British Columbia. That particular amendment was restrictive in its application. In other words, it took out of payment certain lands which were described as having been the property of the crown in 1940 and which had been placed in cultivation after that date, either through sale, lease or by other methods. As a result a number of people were brought under the act and have been under the act since 1940 but they found themselves in a position where they could not receive any benefits.

There was a certain amount of logic in the amendment as it applied to certain areas in Alberta and Saskatchewan which lay within the old Palliser triangle. By the way, those lands should never have been placed under cultivation. However, during the first war we and our allies were greatly in need of wheat and this land was brought into cultivation.

The Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Act was passed, I believe in 1935, and an attempt was made to withdraw certain of these lands. In our opinion the 1950 amendment to the Prairie Farm Assistance Act was not only restrictive, it was discriminatory. Those of us from Saskatchewan felt that it was a slap at the administration of the land policy of the provincial governments concerned. It indicated that the Department of Agriculture felt that the provincial administrations had not been doing a good job. Therefore, there were certain of us who resented it.

We believed that the provincial governments in Alberta and Saskatchewan were endeavouring to develop land utilization policies which would be for the benefit, not

only of the provinces but of the dominion as a whole. The original amendment as brought in was much more restrictive than would appear from the act. When it was placed before the agricultural committee the minister made certain amendments to exempt several areas in the provinces.

If the Prairie Farm Assistance Act and the Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Act are to be operated successfully, it can only be done with the co-operation of the provincial governments. The sooner we understand that and the sooner those in Ottawa recognize the necessity for co-operation the more efficient and beneficial the operation of these acts will be in Saskatchewan, Alberta and Manitoba. The position we took at that time is now proved to be correct, because the minister is introducing an amendment which in effect exempts all lands north of township 60 in the provinces of Alberta and British Columbia from the operation of the amendment passed in 1950. To be fair, so far as the province of Manitoba is concerned lands north of township 30 should be exempted. In the province of Saskatchewan lands north of township 40 as far west as the third meridian and lands north of township 50 from the third meridian to the Alberta border should be exempted. They would be the same type of land as is affected by this amendment concerning the provinces of Alberta and British Columbia.

The minister has undertaken that if there should be an area in the northern part of Saskatchewan, and I presume in Manitoba too, which is affected later in the same way as the area in the northern part of Alberta, further amendments will be made to the act so that payments can be made in those areas to those who may be affected. He has placed certain figures on the record with respect to the number of parcels of land affected. In Alberta in 1950 there were 1,628 quarter sections and in 1951, 3,689 quarter sections. He has indicated that in the province of Saskatchewan in 1950 there were only 56 quarter sections affected and 978 in 1951. I do not know whether he has any information to indicate whether the 978 quarter sections in the province of Saskatchewan are in the northern or southern part of the province. We are prepared to allow the bill to go through without too much debate and without moving an amendment on the understanding already given by the minister that if a similar area should be affected in the province of Saskatchewan at a later date an amendment will be introduced to provide for payments in that area.

I should like the assurance of the minister that it will not be necessary for the same number of parcels of land to be affected before