

Prairie Grain Advance Payments Act

minister would make earlier today since it is not too often that this particular law of the land, namely, the Prairie Grain Advance Payments Act, comes before Parliament. We should refresh our memories and remind the public, particularly in eastern Canada—and those who roost in yon gallery should be able to do a better job than they have in previous years—that cash advances are not taxpayers' money. Very often people in central Canada and in the extreme east and west of the country have had the impression that these payments were some kind of gift to the grain growers in the three prairie provinces.

I suppose this could have been called the original grain stabilization income plan. It was a measure that advanced a farmer's wages to him at the time he most needed them, namely, long after he had earned them. He had to repay them as and when he delivered grain. That was one of the reasons this act was passed. The second reason for this legislation was the complete failure of the old line parties and governments, and the transportation system over which ultimately they had control, to do a proper job of allowing the grain producers to deliver their products and to receive the income to which they were justifiably entitled.

Cash advances were interest-free and varied in amount—I am only guessing, and the minister will correct me if I am wrong—from \$4 million to \$15 million a year, if I can make a wild guess. However, the cost was justified simply because one particular segment of our society was unable to receive the income it should have received. As my colleague from Battleford-Kindersley (Mr. Thomson) has said, the advances that were made cost the taxpayers nothing in relative terms. I suspect less than one-hundredth of one per cent of cash advances since 1957 ever went bad; they were repaid promptly on time.

If the plans of the minister, both present and future, in connection with quotas and deliveries work, this means there will be less need for cash advances, certainly compared with the late 1950s and early 1960s, a period when we were the victims of the same sort of government as this. Nevertheless, if the minister's proposals work, there will be less demand and need for cash advances. Certainly, if he meets his delivery objective as a result of the proposed quota system, there will be less use made of cash advances.

Therefore, it is only logical that the minister should bring in amending legislation of the sort we now have before the House, and one cannot quarrel with that. One might be able to quarrel after waiting a year to see how his proposals work out, and we might have more fun in one year's time than we are having tonight. Having said that, I am afraid I must now get a little mean and impute motives to the minister and his government.

Mr. Rose: You cannot do that!

Mr. Benjamin: I have to; I have no alternative. There is a very crucial additional reason for bringing in this legislation, especially in view of the kind of government we have and the kind of minister who is in charge of the Wheat Board. The task force on agriculture has stated

[Mr. Benjamin.]

that direct intervention by the government in agriculture must be resisted, indeed eliminated. This particular change, one of many we are being asked to approve, will save the government money. When you deliver grain and repay your cash advances 100 per cent as you deliver, instead of 50 per cent, the interest charges that the government had been paying before will be substantially reduced. This measure will allow the government to implement what the task force on agriculture has been advocating and what I believe now to be government policy. That results in a further erosion of rural Canada and the loss of tens of thousands of people to those areas.

● (9:10 p.m.)

I am afraid I must be mean and say this is the reason behind it, because the minister could not possibly know, however confident he might be about his proposals on quotas and deliveries, whether this legislation will work or how successful it will be. This amendment to the Prairie Grain Advance Payments Act will save several millions of dollars in interest charges which the government would have to pay.

The minister has been advising farmers, as did his predecessors, and my colleague the hon. member for Regina East (Mr. Burton) listed some of the results of this advice. I can only say that a number of the farmers in my constituency deliberately choose to do exactly the opposite of what the minister advises. I understood the advice of the minister several months ago to be that farmers should not get excited or carried away and sow too much flax, mustard, rapeseed or Durum. I phoned a grain farmer in my constituency who raises other things besides grain, including a bunch of kids, the morning following the minister's statement and asked him what he thought of the minister's advice. He said he went out that morning and put in another 40 acres of Durum. In effect, he did exactly the opposite of what the minister suggested. I might add that he is not doing too badly in respect of Durum deliveries this year, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Lang: Oh, come on!

Mr. Benjamin: He did exactly the opposite. The minister and his government should realize that their credibility is in such a bad state, and has been for many years, that it is now the practice of practical farmers to either do half as much as he suggests, or exactly the opposite. Farmers who follow that course are more often right than they are wrong.

My colleague, the hon. member for Regina East, mentioned the confusion of the editor of the *Hi-Way 15 Gazette*. If the farmers are confused about the minister's advice, you can imagine the state of confusion in which the editors of weekly newspapers find themselves. The minister contributes a weekly column to newspapers in my riding and in the riding of the hon. member for Regina East. As that hon. member has suggested, he is butting in. That is not the only area where he butts in. He writes to newspapers in my constituency urging that post offices be closed down. I do not mind the minister attempting to be helpful, but this sort of thing is a little ridiculous.