

*Western Grain Stabilization*

is the Minister of Agriculture who traditionally and by statute should ensure that producers receive a reasonable income. What, in fact, the Wheat Board is performing under the stabilization act is the carrying out of the mechanics of the act. The licensed elevators and feed mills serve as the collectors of a levy and the permit books of the Wheat Board serve as a verification unit for the levy. In other words, the Wheat Board is a catalyst to help in the working of the stabilization act; but in principle it is the Minister of Agriculture who should have introduced the bill to the House.

Then, again, we often hear the minister responsible for the Wheat Board referred to as the minister for everything in western Canada. If, as we understand, he is looking after transportation, it is not surprising that he should also be looking after legislation dealing with incomes of farmers. If the government puts forward other legislation which may peripherally affect the western farmer, the minister in charge of the Wheat Board will, no doubt, be given that responsibility as well. Nevertheless, it seems logical to me that the minister responsible for this legislation should be the Minister of Agriculture, and the time has come for the minister responsible for the Wheat Board, who is also the honorary minister of transport—

**Mr. Benjamin:** Anything but that.

**Mr. Hnatyshyn:** I am sorry if that remark caused some alarm. I am simply saying that the logical place for this legislation is with the Department of the Minister of Agriculture, and I hope the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau), when in due course he carries out a cabinet shuffle, will dispose of the matter accordingly.

I turn now to another aspect of the bill, the question of compulsory membership. The original bill of 1970-71 contained a compulsory aspect. We are told that under the present bill there is no compulsion and that farmers may opt out of the program if they wish. Clause 5 contains provision for opting out, but I suggest the wording is disguised so as to give only an appearance of avoiding compulsion; that in fact it is compulsory to an extent. Also, I would add, it discriminates against one particular genre of producer, making it compulsory for him to join. Under clause 5(1) a person who is an eligible, active producer—a producer who is actually working on the land as opposed to a producer recorded in a permit book—has three years to decide to cease to become a participant. This decision must be made at the time the act comes into force. Thus, between 1975 and 1978 a producer may elect to withdraw.

On December 4, 1974, the minister responsible for the Wheat Board issued a press release dealing with the stabilization act. On page 7 appeared the title "Participation Voluntary" and the sentence "No farmer will be forced to participate in the plan". The minister is incorrect when he says participation is voluntary. Webster's Dictionary defines "voluntary" as "brought about by one's own free will or choice". A producer does not have the luxury of free will or choice if a time limit of three years is imposed upon him. Voluntary withdrawal should mean that a producer can decide to abandon the plan at any time. Here we find a limitation imposed upon voluntary withdrawal; it is restricted by a time period. It is difficult to understand

[Mr. Hnatyshyn.]

why the minister is imposing this time-frame. It cannot be because the plan would not be actuarially sound if a large proportion of producers dropped out. The fund only affects those producers who have contributed to it; the producers who put the money into the fund will receive money when the circumstances call for such action.

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At page 9 of the same press release, the minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board said that the federal treasury "will guarantee the solvency of the western grain stabilization fund". Also, the producers are paying only for this special kind of insurance and not for the administration costs that accrue to it. At page 8 of the press release the following statement appears:

The costs of administering the plan will be borne entirely by the federal government. No administrative costs will be deducted from the fund.

Clause 5(2) of the bill provides that once a producer has withdrawn, he may elect to join the plan again. Clause 5(4) adds that the producer is allowed to come in only once, and no more. But under clause 5(3) this producer will be classified as a conditional participant for three years. In effect, a penalty is associated with this category; if a payment is to be made within those three years, the conditional participant will receive only 90 per cent of the benefits. This is a form of discrimination. One part of the bill provides that a producer may voluntarily withdraw; another part provides that if the producer returns to the plan, he must face a penalty. The bill is really providing that voluntary producers do not exist but that coercion of the producer does.

It must be emphasized that only existing, actual producers have this option for a one-time withdrawal from the plan. Clause 6 of the bill provides that new producers will automatically be in the plan once the legislation is implemented; but there is no option for the withdrawal of new producers. To allow an existing producer a rather haphazard option to withdraw, and to prevent any new producer from having equal opportunity to do the same, is discriminatory. One is left with the conclusion that the federal government does not believe that new producers can fend for themselves but, rather, must be quickly swept under the protective fold of the federal plan. Hence, I suggest that the voluntary aspect of this legislation will have to receive the closest attention of the committee and the representations of people in western Canada.

I should like to deal with one or two other aspects of the bill. I realize the hon. member for Yorkton-Melville (Mr. Nystrom) wants to say a few words this afternoon, and I do not want to curtail him unduly; but since I have this captive audience which seems to be most attentive, I shall continue with my informative remarks.

**An hon. Member:** We feel obligated.

**Mr. Hnatyshyn:** My hon. friend always does me the honour of being in the chamber when I speak. I do appreciate it. He shows great discrimination by listening to me. With regard to protection for the individual producer, one of the major remaining objections to the bill, which is a carryover from the proposed 1971 legislation, is that the plan will not take note of the major differences in