

Grain

agricultural conditions in all of Canada. I am not unmindful of the fact that the farmers in other areas are suffering hardships from this same price-cost squeeze. Perhaps the unique set of circumstances, the benevolent years we have had, have caused the tremendous buildup of grain in western Canada; but we do know when we have a situation which requires a fruit grower of British Columbia to spend three boxes of apples to buy one bushel of wheat and a wheat farmer in Saskatchewan to spend three bushels of wheat to buy one box of apples, something is drastically wrong and that governmental action must be taken at an early date to resolve this basic problem for the benefit of all Canada.

Mr. J. A. Smith (Battle River-Camrose): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to be able to take part in this debate on second reading of Bill No. 14, to provide for advance payments for prairie grain prior to delivery thereof.

Before starting my remarks, Mr. Speaker, I should like to compliment the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Harkness) on the very able way in which he presented this bill this afternoon. I could not help but feel that there had been quite a change in the way bills were presented to members of parliament sitting in opposition groups.

The arguments for cash advances on farm-stored grain have been presented to this house for many years and they have been presented already in the course of this debate and at the resolution stage. Two years ago, and again last year, extensive debate was carried on on a bill called the Prairie Grain Producers' Interim Financing Act. When that bill was up for discussion we in this group opposed it on the ground that we did not feel that that particular bill, or the farm loan wheat bill, as we called it, would give the farmers of western Canada the cash they would need to carry on their operations.

I was very much interested in the remarks of the former minister of agriculture this afternoon. In his remarks the hon. member for Melville (Mr. Gardiner) reminded me very much of his behaviour in previous sessions when he was minister of agriculture and presented the problems of agriculture to the house. It was definitely one of confusion with no information being given. In previous sessions we urged the former minister of trade and commerce to institute a system of cash advances on farm-stored grain which would assure the grain farmers of western Canada a temporary measure of relief from the critical financial position they found themselves in. We still feel that this measure, which is up for second reading today and which is being discussed this afternoon, is nothing

more than a temporary measure and it will be only of some immediate assistance to the grain farmers of western Canada.

Regardless of how long we argued with the former minister of trade and commerce he did not see fit to institute a system of cash advances on farm-stored grain. This afternoon the former minister of agriculture did point out that they might have done it this year had they been on the government benches. That situation was very capably handled by the western farmers on June 10 of this year, because the province of Alberta returned only one Liberal member to this house. Therefore, the farmers of Alberta were very definite in their opinion of the agricultural policy, if you can call it a policy, of the former administration.

I am pleased, Mr. Speaker, to see that so many members of the official opposition at the present time see fit to support this legislation in a placid type of way. This change of heart forecasts a much better deal for all those engaged in agriculture, because it is now apparent that the vast majority of the members of this house are prepared to support progressive legislation which will place the farmers of Canada in a better financial position.

My colleague, the hon. member for Acadia (Mr. Quelch), last week placed on record the position of the Social Credit group in the house, with respect to this piece of legislation; and since we feel that there is a degree of urgency associated with the passage of this bill it is not my intention to take up too much of the time of the house this afternoon. However, Mr. Speaker, I wish to point out that we view this legislation as being only a temporary solution, one which will bring a measure of immediate relief to the grain farmers of western Canada and not one which will provide a permanent solution.

Our farm population is steadily decreasing and the average age of those engaged in farming in western Canada is steadily rising. If this situation is permitted to continue we shall quite possibly find ourselves concerned, not with so-called man-made surpluses but with actual shortages of foodstuffs. Young people for very obvious reasons, are not staying on the farms, largely because of the fact that they are all too well acquainted with the uncertainty attached to that type of life. They are not prepared to work from dawn to dark, to gamble with weather and so forth for the meagre returns which their fathers have received in the last few years. Instead of following in their fathers' footsteps they have entered other occupations in which they are assured of a larger measure of security and greater financial returns.