

*Western Grain Stabilization*

**Mr. Horner:** One of my hon. friends has said that not more than 5 per cent of those who sit in the House of Commons understand it. I think he is right. If anybody believes he understands it, let him read clause 12 which deals with the calculation of individual stabilization payments, or let him look at page 5405 of *Hansard* and read the tables which the hon. member for Timiskaming (Mr. Peters) put on record, and try to determine what this complicated equation is leading up to.

It is my contention that the bill should be subject to exhaustive study to determine whether it benefits Canada. I have no doubt at all that it will benefit the federal government. It will give them an excuse; it will not have to measure up to its moral obligation to look after the farmers should a calamity take place. It will give the salesmen a sense of added security to the extent that if they do not sell the crops, the farmers will not be on their backs so badly.

The minister will admit that there are years when we have not gone out and sold out crops. I rarely give the minister in charge of the Wheat Board a pat on the back; I rarely think he deserves it. But he was instrumental in selling barley a few years ago. Mind you, Mr. Speaker, I think he sold it 50 cents too cheaply, so his intervention was really costly for the western farmer. But he knows what I am talking about when I say this bill will encourage the complacency which salesmen are inclined to feel when they are not obliged to make sales; and as a western farmer, I do not want my salesmen to feel such complacency—I want them to know that they have to sell, sell, sell. Also, as a taxpayer, I do not want the government to feel that it can avoid the moral obligation of aiding a region which has been beset by calamity or disaster.

The bill takes the place of two legislative enactments, one of which is the Prairie Farm Assistance Act. Prairie farm assistance payments would be applicable where there was a township with crops below an eight bushel average, but anything less than a township did not qualify. Finally, this was broken down to half a township, 18 sections, because they found out there were many pockets within a township that could not get a payment. Eighteen sections turned out to be too big a block and this was broken down further to 12 sections.

● (1440)

This bill deals with the whole of the prairie region right from the Ontario side of the Manitoba border clean through to the interior of British Columbia. Anyone who is seriously concerned with the plight of agriculture and the farmers, in view of past experiences with PFAA which this bill replaces, will realize that the bill will not apply one year in 20, and that it is no good. In 1971, passage of a bill similar to this through the House of Commons was prevented. This is a long story which other members have gone into, so I shall not do so; but its passage was prevented because the government of that day had broken the law. I am not going to make any wild accusations; the Prime Minister of that day admitted publicly that the government had broken the law. It just happens that the Prime Minister of that day is the Prime Minister today. The Minister of Justice, whose legislation broke the law in 1971, is today now trying to get through the House an even more complicated bill.

[Mr. Gillies.]

If there are some members on this side of the House who are slightly suspicious, can you fault them for that, Madam Speaker? I think the track record of this kind of legislation in the House of Commons bears very careful examination. For example, it is not regional enough. The equation relating to the accountable year is, in my opinion, inadequate. One simple change that could be made, if the government insists on this salve for their conscience, is to allow a producer to take the best three years out of the last five, rather than to insist on the last three absolutely in equating what payment will be made to him.

It is often said of some of the dryer parts of western Canada that crop cycles come once in seven years. Some people even say once every ten years. I would not like to see dry conditions for seven years, but I suggest that there are many parts of the prairies that could easily have seven years of dry conditions. Certainly, they can have three years of dry conditions. I can go back to recent history and recall that the years 1961, 1962 and 1963 were poor years. The year 1964 was not much better, and crop production improved a little in 1965.

If this simple change of letting a producer take the best three years out of the last five in equating his payment were made, it would allow some tolerance to take into consideration drought conditions from which particularly young farmers might suffer. It would not make any difference to a large, well established farmer because more than likely he has been able to build up the reserves on his farm and his sales will show greater continuity than is the case with a young farmer who is just starting out. So although my proposal would not affect, either plus or minus, large farmers, it may well be of benefit to small producers who have to sell every year and thus cannot build up any reserves.

Talking of building up reserves, it is of interest to note conditions today on the prairies. The Wheat Board has stated that on May 15 it is closing out all delivery permits for wheat. That is, at best, a threat. Why is the Wheat Board doing this, Madam Speaker? It is because 30 to 40 per cent of the grain is still on the farms and the farmers do not appear to be in any rush to deliver it. They are busy with seeding problems, road conditions, bans on roads, and the Wheat Board has commitments to meet and wants grain delivered.

I point this out merely to prove beyond a shadow of doubt to any of the non-farmers in the House this afternoon that it is accustomed practice for a well established farmer to build up the reserves on his farm, whereas a young farmer does not have that opportunity. He has a capital debt to meet, a family to raise and feed, and machinery to buy and pay for. He is the person we should be encouraging today, and this bill does not encourage him enough.

I trust this bill will be very thoroughly examined, with every opportunity given to witnesses to appear before the committee so the farm organizations and indeed the farmers themselves are made aware of its exact implications. I say that in view of the cut-off date of January 1, 1978. If you do not voluntarily come into the plan before 1978, under clause 16 of the bill you have to write to the minister and get his permission to come into the plan.