

Withholding of Grain Payments

I sat in incredulity and heard the minister deliberately digging his own political grave in the sort of speech he made tonight. I remember the late Right Hon. C. D. Howe, who made many contributions to this country during the dark days of World War II, coming out with a statement that indicated how arrogant the Liberal administration of which he was a member in the latter days of the regime had become. In a debate on a very important issue he said: "If we are not careful this discussion is going to degenerate into a debate". The implications of that statement, of course, have much in common with some of the points that were made by the government spokesman in this House tonight. I see that the Whip of the government party has something to say, but unfortunately I did not catch what he said.

Mr. Lang: He said that that won't happen now.

Mr. Dinsdale: Perhaps he intends to take part in this debate, because not many of his troops are left this evening. The point I want to make in this debate is to bring before the minister the situation existing in western Canada of which he is apparently completely ignorant or for which he has utter disregard. He was trying to point out in his defence of the indefensible here tonight that if the Parliament of Canada would only pass Bill C-244, all the problems that beset the western economy at the present time would melt away in the morning sunshine.

Mr. Lang: I did not say that.

Mr. Dinsdale: But this was the implication of the remarks, and we will be very pleased to have this point clarified because the only justification he gave for failing to discharge the responsibilities of the government under the Temporary Wheat Reserves Act was that we were delaying the passage of Bill C-244 which is designed to solve these basic problems. It happens to be the opinion of a substantial group in this House, and of most of the farmers and the people of western Canada, that Bill C-244 would worsen the situation that has already been seriously worsened by the actions or lack of actions of this government.

Bill C-244, as I understand it after having discussed the issue with my farmers, would not stabilize the prairie agricultural industry but would stagnate the industry and reduce it to the poverty level. How a minister of the Crown with responsibility for the Canadian Wheat Board which has been one of the mainstays of the prairie grain industry over the years ever since it was first conceived by a Conservative administration can take this attitude of trying to foist upon the people of western Canada a bill, a government policy and an initiative that would cause profound disturbances in the prairie economy, an economy that is already at a disastrously low level, is beyond the comprehension of the hon. member for Brandon-Souris.

Mr. Lang: So is the bill.

Mr. Dinsdale: The point at issue with reference to the defence of the minister is that apparently he fails to

[Mr. Dinsdale.]

appreciate that the farmers of western Canada are now confronted with a situation where even those with long experience who would normally be thought of as having been firmly established in the prairie economy are finding it impossible to survive. Others who have spoken here tonight have pointed out the reason. The minister does not seem to understand the cost-price squeeze, the decline of grain prices with the collapse of the International Wheat Agreement because of the failure of the government to seize the initiative in these matters, and also the fact that even though grain sales are up—and this is one of the arguments that the minister used ad nauseum here tonight—this is doing nothing to increase the prosperity of the prairie wheat farmer. He is deeply in debt from cash advances and other last resort financial measures that he has been assuming in order to survive in the tragic economic situation in the prairies. The farmer is in a position where his cash flow has been completely cut off, and this year he will not likely have access to cash advances in order to help himself in the struggle against encroaching poverty.

● (12:40 a.m.)

To bring these brief remarks to a conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I quote a former member of this House who is now a distinguished member of the press gallery. From time to time he comments on agriculture and other western matters. I refer to Mr. Douglas Fisher who on several occasions has attempted to regain his place in this House. About a year ago he lost his bid for the NDP nomination in Selkirk, Manitoba, and summed up the reason for his failure to make a strong showing, according to a Canadian Press story dated February 23, 1970, as follows:

As a resident of Ottawa I was under the Trudeau curse. The sentiment is so strong against Ottawa that it goes against someone who even lives there.

From the stubborn, almost obtuse attitude of the minister I can only conclude that he too is under the Trudeau curse or spell, because the position he has taken with regard to this important matter is so completely incomprehensible to the people of western Canada. It is one of the reasons why we have witnessed in recent months a disturbing growth in the feeling of alienation on the Prairies.

When I refer to the Trudeau curse I recall that the right hon. gentleman who is the leader of the government, during an appearance before a farm audience in the city of Winnipeg made this strange and incomprehensible statement with reference to declining grain sales, "Don't expect us to sell your wheat." Obviously he did not even realize that under the Canadian Wheat Board Act the farmer has no other recourse than to sell his wheat through the board.

Confidence is important for the general economic well-being of the country. As the hon. member for Egmont (Mr. MacDonald) said a moment ago, prosperity is indivisible. The sort of defense that the minister made tonight is a disservice to the people he represents in his constituency in Saskatchewan. It is reminiscent of the defence he tried to make as recently as yesterday in face of