

Western Grain Stabilization Act

We hope that for other legislation, we shall occasionally have the support and co-operation of the Opposition parties.

The Minister responsible for the Bill has an appointment at one o'clock, but I shall remain in the House to listen to the speeches of our hon. friends.

[English]

Mr. Gustafson: Mr. Speaker, I am flattered that the Minister is going to remain in the House and hear about the importance of this Bill to farmers.

I was saying earlier that we wanted to give quick passage to this Bill. I read a list of Members who called for quick passage. In addition to that, our leader, the Hon. Member for Central Nova (Mr. Mulroney), rose in the House on April 4 last and asked the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) if he would give immediate passage to the Bill so that farmers could have their money in their hands for spring seeding. We all know the history and the Prime Minister did exactly what he has been doing for farmers for a number of years. An example of that is 1968, when he told the farmers to sell their own wheat. It is clear that the Liberal Government continues to treat farmers across Canada as second-class citizens. I will back up that statement with many examples of farmers being put on the back burner.

Following the request made by our Leader, the then Opposition House Leader, the Hon. Member for Yukon (Mr. Nielsen), sent a letter to the Government House Leader saying that we were willing to pass the Bill immediately. The Government has been playing politics with this Bill for well over a year, when the farmers could have had the money in their pockets. I want to put that on the record so that the farmers are aware of how they have been treated.

Earlier I was speaking about the amount of money farmers have paid in. The maximum for each farmer is \$5,700, which with interest would add up to over \$8,000. This is their money and they need it. The Minister talked—about farmers opting out. He mentioned the fact that it was a major topic of discussion on the Prairies. It was, Mr. Speaker, because farmers need the cash now. They should have had it in their pockets before seeding and they were refused. Farmers have faced very serious economic problems. The Minister of Agriculture and his Government have failed to address the problem of interest rates. It is no great service to the farmers to charge them 1 per cent more than they can get from the banks. They talk about priorities. Is that a priority consideration for agriculture? We need a government which will give some consideration to agriculture. We need to call an election to change this Government and give some priority to agriculture. That will stimulate the economy to the extent it needs to be and could be stimulated.

I referred to opting out, Mr. Speaker. A farmer who opts out does so without the return of his contribution. The situation which has existed in this program comes about because of three major factors. Volumes have increased significantly. How did that come about? Because our farmers have been very productive. If you go back into the history of agriculture

in North America, you find that in 1905 the farmers made up 95 per cent of the population of Canada. They produced to the best of their ability. Then, because of technological developments and automation, and particularly because of the productive nature of farmers, we have been able, with 4½ per cent of the population, to produce enough food to feed Canada, and the world if it was distributed properly. I am proud to stand in this place and be counted as one of those productive people, but I am sorry to have to tell you that we have seen this Government neglect that kind of productivity. Farmers contribute some \$8 billion to this country's balance of payments, money which could be used to stimulate the economy.

I ask you, Mr. Speaker, what would happen if a Conservative Government were elected in this country, a Government with some understanding of agriculture, a Government with some representation in agriculture, a Government with a Leader like ours who would make agriculture a priority? If I had the time I would like to extend that line of thought into other industries such as forestry, mining and manufacturing, fisheries and so on. We have had examples of the Government paying out billions of dollars to subsidize certain areas of the economy, yet it does not give priority to agriculture. The Budget indicates that. It was a \$100 billion Budget, Mr. Speaker, and how much of that is going to agriculture? Some 1.2 per cent, or roughly \$1.2 billion. Agriculture is on the bottom of the ladder and it should be at the top.

This Western Grain Stabilization Act is an example of how the Government has dealt with this very serious matter. It failed to use the program. Now the Minister says that the Government is addressing the problems, and we are thankful for that. But why is this happening now? It is because there is to be an election. It should have been done two or three years ago. Grain prices dropped two and a half years ago, costs went way up, fuel costs doubled for farmers but this Government did not move. Our Leader, the Hon. Member for Central Nova, who I believe is going to be the next Prime Minister of this country, stood in his place and asked the Government to remove the 9 per cent sales tax. Did the Government remove it? No, it did not. Today we had an outstanding example of how the Government treats us. The Minister of Finance (Mr. Lalonde) stood in his place and, although I would not think knowingly, possibly misled the Canadian people about the price of fuel.

● (1310)

Fuel is crossing the 49th parallel in my own riding at the port of entry of Regway for 78 cents a gallon. You will remember the 18-cent tax. There is no provincial tax in Saskatchewan or Alberta on farm fuel. I sat on the energy committee when the Minister led that committee and brought in a dreadful national energy policy which hid away several aspects.

When we were defeated on the 18 cents tax we went home to fight an election. In the little town of Macoun fuel cost 98 cents a gallon. Today it is close to \$1.90 a gallon. The Minister tells the Canadian people that he does not know where this