

Prairie Grain Advance Payments Act

The Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce has a tremendous capacity for affability. He smiles.

Mr. Pepin: That is something.

Mr. Diefenbaker: He smiles attractively. He can take his place anywhere, even in Hollywood, when it comes to his capacity to smile. But what is needed is action.

Now let me point out one other phase in connection with the farm problem today, and it is all part and parcel of the same problem. It has to do with the sale of low grade wheat by farmers to feed mills. Farmers cannot market their wheat but they have to get rid of it. The result is that they are selling their wheat at 80 to 90 cents a bushel. So far as barley is concerned, they are selling it at 40 cents a bushel whereas going prices are \$1.80, and No. 3 wheat, to which I made reference a moment ago, is around \$1.90. Thirty-six million bushels were sold by farmers directly in 1968. The reason for that is that the farmers have this wheat on hand. They see the spring coming and they have to get rid of it so they take what they can get.

With all the power I can put into my words I ask the government as a major step to provide something in the nature of acreage payments. However, if this is not possible it should carry out the wishes of the western farmers, supported by the wheat pools and the farm organizations, by providing the farmers with at least 5 cents a bushel—some say 10 cents, the actual cost of drying being 10 cents. But I say 5 cents with a maximum amount to a farmer of \$200. If the government would do something like this they would get things moving.

• (12:30 p.m.)

This legislation is all right as far as it goes but it does not go very far. It is just another example of the uncertain, nonchalant and lackadaisical way in which the government is approaching one of the most serious problems Canada has ever faced, the like of which the western provinces have never seen before. Even though the minister did not become Minister of Agriculture, a portfolio he was prepared to accept as a last resort if he could not become minister of justice, I should like to see him take a stand now on behalf of the farmers of western Canada. Many of his own constituents are in a desperate position. This legislation, though it should pass, is merely a step. What is required is a direct payment to the farmer to encourage drying operations

[Mr. Diefenbaker.]

and compensate him for the loss he has suffered through no fault of his own by reason of climatic conditions.

Mr. A. P. Gleave (Saskatoon-Biggar): Mr. Speaker, I say at the outset that the real question confronting us as we discuss this proposal is: does it meet the existing problem? As a member of this house and as a farmer I am bound to consider whether it meets the situation now facing agriculture in western Canada. This legislation apparently embodies what the government is prepared to do, and since the government is advancing it I presume that hon. members opposite consider it sufficient to cope with the situation.

With regard to the amount of grain of all kinds to be dried in western Canada, all we have at present are estimates. There is the flat statement by the chairman of the Canadian Wheat Board, Mr. McNamara, that only a relatively small proportion can be dried in the commercial facilities at the terminals and elsewhere and that the bulk of it will have to be dried on the farms. From the various estimates which have been made I suspect that some 300 million to 350 million bushels of damp grain on the prairies will have to be dried on the farms.

The proposal in this bill is that a loan of 10 cents a bushel up to a certain maximum be made available to farmers to enable them to cope with this problem. One of the main drawbacks is that the money is to be advanced in the form of a loan.

Suppose an area in Canada, as has happened from time to time, were to be afflicted by a disaster of outside proportions. Surely we would recognize it as such and take measures to give the necessary assistance. I suggest to this house that the grain growing areas of Canada are facing such an emergency today. As the right hon. member for Prince Albert (Mr. Diefenbaker) has just said, it is a disaster without precedent. I have farmed in western Canada all my life and in all my experience I have seen nothing like it. On top of this is the grain delivery situation. What we are telling farmers in this bill is, in effect: you have been able to borrow so much money because you cannot sell your grain; now you can borrow so much more money in order to dry it. But the farmer knows he will not be able to sell his product even after it has been dried, so his obligations will mount. Some may ask why the farmer does not stick his neck out since he cannot lose. Well, he has got it out about as far as he can put it right now.