

Withholding of Grain Payments

to the Minister of Finance. The Minister of Finance, by statute—not by his own decision but by statute—has the responsibility to rebate that money to the Wheat Board. Obviously, he gets the request from the minister in charge of the Wheat Board. Once the request is made, the responsibility lies with the Minister of Finance to administer the statute. I suggest there is a dual responsibility, one cannot operate without the other, but obviously the minister in charge of the Wheat Board is responsible to that body. Was there another question?

Mr. Hogarth: Yes. You have been talking about this minister breaking the law—

An hon. Member: It is the government he is talking about.

Mr. Hogarth: You have been talking for half an hour about this minister breaking the law—

Some hon. Members: Order.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, please.

An hon. Member: Why don't you get up and make a speech?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I realize that the hon. member said he would receive a question, but the hon. member who is asking the question should ask it through the Chair.

Mr. Hogarth: My question to the hon. member is this: Where, under sections 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 or 6, which are the sections of the Temporary Wheat Reserves Act, has this minister broken the law? The hon. member will have some support for his position if he can show where this minister, Otto Lang, from Saskatoon-Humboldt has broken the law.

Mr. Peters: Mr. Speaker, I should think two facts are obvious to the hon. member asking the questions.

An hon. Member: Don't count on it.

Mr. Peters: One is that when a decision is made in cabinet, all those who are involved in making the decision must be responsible. I have indicated that the Minister of Finance (Mr. Benson)—this does not leave the other ministers blameless—will not make that statutory payment until this minister bills him for it.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Peters: Until this minister sends in the bill, the Minister of Finance will likely let the account pile up. It is quite possible, with the efficiency of the Minister of Finance, that he may not know that we have a bill of almost \$92 million under this statute.

Mr. Hogarth: How much?

Mr. Peters: Ninety-two million dollars. Add it up and you will find that this is about the amount. Every day this debate continues, Mr. Speaker, the amount increases and the credibility of the government decreases.

As has been indicated by members who have already spoken and by witnesses who appeared before the agricultural committee, there has been a great deal of

opposition to this piece of legislation. I have received about 2,800 or 2,900 letters and petitions from western Canada. I am quite prepared to say that the petitions were instigated by one or two organizations in western Canada. Most members will agree that farmers there are highly organized, they know exactly what is going on in their business and they know exactly what they will settle for.

Recently there have been elections in the provinces of Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Alberta, the provinces faced with the problems of wheat and cereal grains. Their Ministers of Agriculture and the previous ministers representing different parties have said that they are not satisfied with the stabilization bill and have made arrangements to come to Ottawa around the beginning of October to discuss it.

It would seem to me, Mr. Speaker, that members who really believed that the farmers of western Canada should be given a break would be pressing the government to shelve this piece of legislation and to make the payments under the Temporary Wheat Reserves Act as required by law. The minister can lie all he wants, but we are only talking about \$15 or \$16 million at the most—

Some hon. Members: Order.

Mr. Peters:—and, by my calculation, \$7 million or \$8 million. That is all the money we have to talk about in the arrangement that must be made in making this new bill operative and taking over from the Temporary Wheat Reserves Act.

Let me address a question through you, Mr. Speaker, to those members from Quebec who are interested in agriculture. Would they be satisfied to have the Minister of Agriculture or the minister responsible for farm operations in the province of Quebec make a decision on their behalf when their farm organizations were opposed to it? Of all the representations made before the agricultural committee, none supported the bill as it stands.

This bill has received a great deal of public attention and the government has flooded western Canada with propaganda about it. But if they are still of the opinion that it is the best bill possible and is acceptable to western Canada, they would be willing to wait for the representations of the Ministers of Agriculture of the prairie provinces. They would be as willing to listen to them as to the Ministers of Agriculture of New Brunswick, Quebec or Ontario talking about potato problems in those provinces.

I believe this cabinet has decided that they have a majority and that the law does not matter, that Parliament does not matter, that the people do not matter—

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Peters:—that they are supreme, and the only way they can be tested is with an election. If that is their desire, Mr. Speaker, let us not waste two or three months getting around to it; let's do it now.

• (8:20 p.m.)

It seems to me that no matter what proposition is put before Members of Parliament, it should be considered as being flexible. It should be amendable and it should be the kind of proposition that would be acceptable at least to the majority of the people who are to have it thrust