

Prairie Farm Assistance Act

So what we are suggesting is that one group of farmers in the northern part of Alberta have already been required to wait a whole year for their payments. The payments to the 1,628 quarter sections in 1950 would have been due in December of 1950, so they have not had their payments for a year. The payment of these other quarter sections will be due in December of this year, 1951. If the legislation were not passed at this session, but were carried over into the next session, they would be denied their payments for that length of time. The suggestion therefore in the legislation is that in British Columbia and Alberta we withdraw the effect of the amendment of 1950 and make payments possible to these farmers who live north of township 60. That is township 60, and north from there, we find from checking the map carefully, does take care of these persons who are concerned.

When I explained this at the resolution stage the hon. member for Lake Centre (Mr. Diefenbaker) and the hon. member for Melfort (Mr. Wright) raised the question of possible discrimination. As I explained at that time, I had included in it the provinces of Saskatchewan and Manitoba. But on further discussion of the matter it was agreed that we could not settle Saskatchewan and Manitoba at present because as these figures I have quoted would indicate there is no development of any district, in Saskatchewan or Manitoba, at the moment that can be dealt with in the same way we are proposing to deal with in Alberta and British Columbia. What I do wish to state, however, is that the decision given to the committee in 1950 still applies in so far as Saskatchewan and Manitoba are concerned. The position we took then was that until an area developed where payment ought to be made, it was most difficult to draw lines, and we should allow that to develop before drawing any lines.

What I wish to say now is that exactly the same position continues to exist in connection with Saskatchewan and Manitoba as is being dealt with in Alberta and British Columbia, with all the facts before us in connection with the matter. In other words, if our experience in administering the act indicates that a district develops in Saskatchewan or Manitoba which has the same rights as now exist in these areas in Alberta and British Columbia, it will be dealt with in the same way. That is to say, the passing of this legislation at this time will not lessen the claims of those in Saskatchewan or Manitoba, and therefore it is not discriminatory in any way. It strengthens their position. The fact that we had already dealt with it in Alberta and British Columbia

[Mr. Gardiner.]

on that basis should make it eminently clear that if a similar situation develops in the future in other provinces it will be dealt with in the same manner.

My main objective in suggesting that this be put through at this session is what I mentioned at the beginning, namely, that from our examination of the circumstances surrounding all these lands it is evident farmers there are entitled to payment. We suggest that if the legislation were not put through this session making that payment possible there would be considerably more delay in getting the money forward to these farmers. We therefore suggest that the legislation be put through the several stages and sent over to the Senate so that it can be passed by them and assented to today.

Mr. P. E. Wright (Melfort): Mr. Speaker, we on this side of the house are agreed that this legislation should be put forward at this session. I intend to reserve any further remarks I have to make until the bill is before us, which I understand will be in a few minutes.

Mr. Gardiner: I intended to read the one pertinent line so that every member would have it in his mind. There are printed copies of the bill available but probably they have not been distributed. The only exception is in this part:

(vi) lands lying north of township sixty in each of the provinces of Alberta and British Columbia.

Mr. Solon E. Low (Peace River): Mr. Speaker, I should like to take one minute to thank the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Gardiner) for bringing forward this bill at this session and to tell him that we deeply appreciate the fact that he has kept the promise he made in 1950 when an amendment was made to the Prairie Farm Assistance Act. We want him to know that there are quite a large number of people in northern Alberta and British Columbia, in the Peace river bloc, whose faith will be revived as a result of this legislation. We want it known too that we who represent northern Alberta's constituencies will certainly support amendments to the act if areas in Saskatchewan and Manitoba should at some future time develop the same kind of situation that we have had in the Peace river country in the past few years. We do not want there to be discriminatory legislation at any time.

Resolution reported, read the second time and concurred in.

Mr. Gardiner thereupon moved for leave to introduce Bill No. 46, to amend the Prairie Farm Assistance Act, 1939.