The minister succeeded by requiring the grain trade and the Canadian Wheat Board to make certain that there was less than a certain amount of grain in store in the terminals at the end of the crop year so there would be no pay-out by the federal treasury under the Temporary Wheat Reserves Act. As a result of that happening, in two successive crop years the act automatically lapsed. So, he found another method to get rid of the Temporary Wheat Reserves Act which, with all its inadequacies, at least implemented the principle that the nation as a whole should share in the cost of storing our grain and that this load should not fall just on the backs of the farmers.

The nation as a whole benefits from what is probably our second or third largest export commodity. One of the largest foreign exchange earners we have is the export market for grain. The nation as a whole benefits from that. We say, therefore, that the nation as a whole should share significantly, at least to the tune of 50 per cent, in the cost of storing grain. That was part of the cost the grain producers suffered in arriving at the stage at which we are now in respect of this legislation. The minister also at that time attempted to repeal the provisions of the Prairie Farm Assistance Act. He did not succeed at that time. However, he has now succeeded by having the act repealed in recent months.

We did not strongly oppose this in recent months because in this instance the minister came some distance toward meeting our objections of 1971. We insisted at that time that if he were to do away with the Prairie Farm Assistance Act, which was a form of crop insurance which protected grain farmers from the hazards of drought and low-crop yields, he must replace it with something as good or better than the PFAA, and to us that meant a substantially larger participation by the national government in a much improved crop insurance program.

● (1730)

The results of those demands and the fight we put up in 1971 are that the government has come round to some significant degree. The additional moneys it was putting into crop insurance meant that premiums for grain farmers in western Canada were cut to a point where something over 60 per cent of them were covered by the crop insurance program.

On this point there is another bill before the House which relates to this one. In the repeal of the Prairies Farm Assistance Act the government wants to take the funds which remain under that legislation, somewhere in the order of $8 million to $10 million, which belongs to the farmers of western Canada and which was largely collected from them compulsorily by deductions from their cash tickets at country elevators. It is their money. It was meant for their use when they had crop failures, drought or low yields, but when the government repealed the PFAA, it wanted to take that $8 to $10 million and put it in trust for the grain stabilization fund.

To me that is another sneaky way of endeavouring to save money. In spite of all the claims of the minister in charge of the Canadian Wheat Board about the increased amount of money which has been put into the agriculture, and particularly the grain industry in western Canada, by the federal government, much of that money comes from funds which were already paid out in other ways. There have not been, in total, increased costs to the federal treasury. The money the government has been saving on grain storage and the money it wants to use from the PFAA account can be subtracted from any amounts it claims it is putting into the support and assistance of the grains industry in western Canada.

This is one of the most complicated pieces of legislation I have seen in the almost seven years I have been here. I confess that having gone over the bill on a number of occasions and having discussed it with people in farm organizations, researchers, committees and statisticians, I have a great deal of difficulty understanding all the provisions in the bill, how well they will work, how they will be applied, and the reasons for them.

But I do not feel lonely, because some of the statisticians, researchers and committees are also puzzled. This leads me to believe that it will be extremely difficult, if not impossible, for a majority of grain producers to understand the legislation, to appreciate how it will affect them, and what its pluses and minuses are. I think it is essential that before this legislation becomes law the government make the most searching and thorough examination of any legislation we have dealt with in a long time.

It is essential—and this request has come from many farmers individually and farm organizations—that the agricultural committee hold meetings, as I said the other evening, in at least two or three dozen places in the three prairie provinces and the Peace River country of British Columbia, the area under the jurisdiction of the Canadian Wheat Board, in order to hear briefs and submissions from those farmers and organizations, and for the committee and its staff to answer their questions. It will be the responsibility of the committee to obtain the answers to any questions it cannot answer, from the minister and his officials, and relay them to those farmers and organizations. That will take some doing and some time. In dealing with this legislation I think it is a must. I know that there is support for that proposition from many quarters.

This bill attempts to use the principle of stabilization, guaranteeing income or guaranteeing net cash flow in a manner which will be so difficult to administer and to fairly apply that it is an extreme possibility that, after a few years of its being in effect, it will destroy the confidence of grain producers and thereby set back the principle of some form of guaranteed income, guaranteed prices, stabilizing, or whatever term one wishes to use. While we agree with this in principle, there is an easier, better and more simple way of doing it. I think the government, in its effort to make improvements on its first attempt, has complicated it more.

The minister said that the bill is intended to stabilize net cash flow. I submit that there are provisions in the bill which prevent that. We can get into that in more detail when we are in committee, but it is intended to stabilize net cash flow from the sale of western grains through the mechanism of a stabilization fund to which contributions are made by both the producer and the federal government, and that when a net cash flow in the total grain industry of western Canada in any year falls below the last five year average, the shortfall is supposed to be paid out of the stabilization fund. I see some danger in the

[Mr. Benjamin.]