

Western Grain Stabilization

but the hon. member for Assiniboia indicated that this was a simple solution for western Canada, and I must say I am pleased he can understand it.

Mr. Goodale: I said it was a good solution; I did not say it was simple. If it was simple even you could understand it.

Mr. Peters: The last plan was simple but it was not operative, and it was not acceptable. This one is so complicated that I do not know whether it is acceptable or not. I have read it, studied it, looked at all the figures, and it is very complicated. It is going to be very difficult to explain to the average farmer in western Canada how this works. He wants a simplified program. You will notice that the payment is to be made over the whole grain area of western Canada, including western Ontario and British Columbia. Maybe we should keep in mind what the farmer actually wants to accomplish.

The federation indicated that they were in favour of income stabilization, and I think they shocked me and a number of other members of parliament when they said so at their appearance before the agricultural committee on Bill C-50. They said that some provinces were going into the stabilization field and that they were particularly pleased with the British Columbia stabilization plan. One of the reasons they were so interested was that they were being asked to help develop and administer it. One of their objectives was a guaranteed price based on the cost of production during times of unfavourable market conditions. This bill does not offer that but it will create such complexity as farmers have never known.

Farmers in western Canada are familiar with regimentation. For years they have had permits, quotas, restrictions on grain delivered to the elevators, the time of delivery; initial and final payments have been set for them; there have been restrictions on how they can operate on their own land, or as a tenant on rented land.

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Under this legislation a farmer's social insurance number will be fed into a computer and the calculation will be automatic. Farmers will be able to contribute a maximum of \$500 on the basis of sales of \$25,000. Do farmers wish to be regimented in this way? The hon. member for Assiniboia and the hon. member from Saskatchewan should remember that if this program had been in effect, say, back, in 1971, there would have been no payouts in recent years. Certainly most areas would not have benefited from it. I say that because grain crops in western Canada seldom vary much.

There have been disasters of various kinds in western Canada, but most of those have stemmed, not from an inability to produce grain, but from ability to meet other conditions. There have been difficulties with delivery, with price, with markets and sometimes with the weather. But this bill does nothing about such things. What will happen if any one area suffers damage, say, from cutworm, or from other factors which reduce the grain crop? Farmers from one area may not be able to market any grain. Yet, because the Wheat Board may market large quantities of grain produced elsewhere, total revenues may be higher than normal and, because the program is

[Mr. Peters.]

based on the national average, the farmers in the afflicted area may not obtain compensation. Remember, farm organizations want stability of farm incomes so that farmers can stay in business.

This measure is complicated, and reminds me of the unemployment insurance structure. Farmers will be governed by a computer in much the same way as workers are governed by the unemployment insurance program computer. The machinery is inhuman and many farmers who ought to receive benefits will not.

Some hon. members have suggested that this program ought to apply on a regional basis, so that if one region suffers a disaster the farmers there can be compensated. Really, the government is not contemplating a program of income stabilization; it is concerned about stabilizing an industry.

I submit, also, that we should give serious consideration to including off-board grain in calculations. After all, many farmers have decided in the past to withhold grain from the Wheat Board and use it to produce livestock. Sometimes this has increased net farm returns. Generally, the availability of grain has been reflected in market prices and has affected other segments of agriculture. When grain prices are low one sees more red meat produced.

I suggest that grain consumed on vertically integrated feed lots may not have been included. On the other hand, if we include off-board grains under the stabilization bill, we shall subsidize the commodities exchange in Winnipeg as well as guarantee the floor to the farmer we intend to assist. Frankly, this problem admits of no easy solution; but then, there are no easy solutions in agriculture.

Although I am not offended by the minister's giving attention to the stabilization of farm income, I think the program ought to be the responsibility of the Minister of Agriculture. I do not think you can divorce the problem of grain from that of beef, livestock, milk, or of any other agricultural commodity. Each of these areas is deserving of attention.

Furthermore, it is no longer necessary to drum up political support for the program by using the sort of tactics used by Jimmy Gardiner. Anyone who is honest will concede that it is no longer necessary to sell political policies as he sold them. Today there is television. Today it is not necessary for politicians to knock on doors in western Canada and say, "Here is a little handout; in return, I want you to vote for Jimmy." This may have happened in years gone by, but I do not think it is necessary today.

In addition to looking at the stabilization of incomes, the minister should also consider the storage of western grain. I submit that we should be storing grain. I remember a story in the Old Testament. As I remember it, Pharaoh sent for Joseph and told him to interpret a strange dream; Pharaoh had seen seven fat cows, followed by seven lean cows, and wondered what the dream meant. Joseph interpreted the dream, saying it signified seven fat years, to be followed by seven lean years. I submit that we should be wise to consider that story. It is quite possible that lean years are ahead. We have spent much money developing markets for wheat; in the last 40 or 50 years we have built up our markets. We need to guarantee our