

Withholding of Grain Payments

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Lewis: The combined opposition parties on this side form a minority in the House, but if the members on the other side, lawyers and others, who know perfectly well that there has been a breach of the law, that it is unforgivable and indefensible—

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Lewis: —showed the courage of their convictions and told their government that they would not stand for it, then the Minister of Finance and the ex-dean of law would have to do what the law tells them to do.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Lewis: There are some members of the House who suggest occasionally that I am a bit hard. I was told at lunch just today—

• (3:50 p.m.)

[*Translation*]

They say that I am hard, Mr. Speaker.

[*English*]

I make no apologies for saying what I did, even though I regard with the greatest respect everyone on the other side whom I have met personally. However, I say to them that there are times in Parliament when this kind of party loyalty should take second place to a clear duty of every Member of Parliament to protect the law and to make the government observe it.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Lewis: I say that the government is guilty of defalcation and contempt of the law. They are guilty also of blackmail because the reason for all of this is that they have put \$100 million into Bill C-244, and combined it with a stabilization plan which is unacceptable to the farmers. In this way they have put on the farmers of western Canada and on farm organizations a double squeeze. They say "you give us the stabilization plan or you will not get either the payments under the Temporary Wheat Reserves Act or the payments under the stabilization act", and I say that that is clear blackmail which is unworthy of any government, unworthy of even the government under which Canada now suffers.

I suggest to you, Sir, that we can restore the place of Parliament, the place of government and the place of the law if the minister who speaks for the government in this debate does several things: first, if he has the sense of duty to admit that perhaps a mistake has been made, made in good faith originally I have no doubt. I do not question that. Originally, the government had a bill that was going to repeal the Temporary Wheat Reserves Act, and it thought it had a good bill. I remember when it was introduced with a paeon of praise as being the best kind of stabilization plan that had ever been conceived. The government may well have thought that therefore it would pass through the House quickly, and that the repeal of the Temporary Wheat Reserves Act would take place, as a result of which payments for a month or two might

be delayed. That may have been the idea of the government in good faith. But the minister now cannot hide behind that.

Fourteen months have passed since August 1, 1970, and for fourteen months the government has failed to obey the law. Therefore, the minister can no longer say "we intended that the act be repealed". Laws are not made by intentions; they are not repealed by intentions. Two or three months might be forgivable, but fourteen months of ignoring the law is surely indefensible. The minister should admit that originally it was hoped that in two or three months the law would be repealed and a new law would take its place. Even then, he would have been out a month or two. Now that he sees that a long time has gone by, that Bill C-244 has not yet passed this House let alone the other place, he should admit that an error was made and should undertake to pay the money out forthwith without any delay, not even the delay of a day. He should pay the money to the Wheat Board and enable the Wheat Board to make the money available to the farmers entitled to it.

Second, I again make a plea to the minister that he split Bill C-244, take the \$100 million, the temporary transitional payment, as a separate item and put this to the House. So far as my party is concerned and I would be surprised if this were not true of the Conservative opposition, we would pass it without debate in half an hour, thus letting the farmers have the advantage of that money.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Lewis: Finally, a meeting is to take place, as the minister admitted during the question period, of the provincial ministers of agriculture of the three prairie provinces who have asked the minister to meet them on Bill C-244 so that they can make suggestions for its improvement. I suggest that it is indecent of the government to try to pass Bill C-244 without at least hearing what the provincial ministers of agriculture of the prairie provinces have to say. Therefore, it seems to me that the road is clear for the government. They should pay the money under the Temporary Wheat Reserves Act without delay, all the money that is now payable, and if the government has the graciousness and generosity, they should split Bill C-244 so as to make the \$100 million available as well.

I have had occasion to spend some time in the prairie provinces in the last few months. I have met many farmers and I know from personal observation, as do many hon. members, that the wheat farmers in western Canada in particular are in great financial distress. They deserve to get the money that is owing to them, not only under one act or the other but under both the Temporary Wheat Reserves Act and under Bill C-244.

I regret to have to say that we cannot agree with the second part of the motion moved by the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Stanfield) because—and I say this with respect—it is simply inaccurate. The Temporary Wheat Reserves Act has not been repealed, and the Revised Statutes do not claim that it was. In the schedule to the statute which sets out the acts which were repealed the Temporary Wheat Reserves Act does not appear.

I will therefore, without taking any more time, move:

That the motion be amended by deleting all the words after the words "the provisions of the Temporary Wheat Reserves Act" and