

Prairie Grain Advance Payments Act

dures by the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles).

An hon. Member: You're heading for trouble.

Mr. Burton: I quickly ascertained that this column had been submitted by the Minister of Manpower and Immigration, the minister in charge of the Canadian Wheat Board. He went on to say what the legislation contained. That was a fair enough article describing the legislation. I sometimes wonder what the minister is up to. Is he so hard put to get people to read his columns, or the material that he puts out, that he must try to steal somebody else's byline?

I must take it as a compliment that the minister chose to use my byline in attempting to put before the readers of the *Hi-Way 15 Gazette* his views about the cash advances legislation. I can understand the minister's position because many people in the west have been caught and now they do not have much faith in the minister's views. I do not object, so long as the minister does not do it too often. I take it as a compliment that the minister used my name in order to obtain greater reader coverage for his column.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Burton: As I have said, we feel there are some useful proposals in this legislation. We are very concerned about the implications concerning the unit quota and the future of the small farmer. I am also concerned about the future of the legislation and hope to hear the minister on these matters.

Mr. Jack Murta (Lisgar): Mr. Speaker, in rising to speak on the amendments to the Prairie Grain Advance Payments Act I would like at the outset to say that I am in general agreement with the changes proposed. Because of the drastic lack of action over the past few years, changes such as the ones proposed, coupled with the advance notice of the minimum quota levels for wheat, oats and barley are, I believe, generally positive steps.

The extending of the cash advance payments from June 1 or, as the bill describes "at such later date in the crop year as may be prescribed" is welcomed by most producers because it will enable them to become more flexible in using the cash advances allotted to them. This, coupled with the repayment schedule, will keep farm cash advances down to a minimum and, hopefully, we will not see situations such as those we saw this year in which, although the grain was moving, there was not any great amount of money going back to the producers. A good deal of the grain that was sold was taken up in paying off the previous cash advances and very little money found its way into the hands of grain producers.

The solution, of course, is to have a much better record of selling grain than we have had previously. Farmers, through no fault of their own, had to borrow money on the grain only to find that because of poor sales they had no chance of paying it back. The value of the cash advance program to prairie grain producers during years when they are unable to make deliveries cannot be

[Mr. Burton.]

doubted. However, the cash advance program should be designed to cope with periodic or cyclical surpluses, and not for perennial overproduction caused by low marketing of grain. The program should not be used to insulate farmers from the realities of the marketplace or to encourage a chronic surplus of unmarketable grain, nor should it be employed to offset the harmful effects of other marketing policies or programs.

• (8:50 p.m.)

One thing which struck me while I was reading the legislation was the phrase "Governor in Council". This term is becoming increasingly more prominent in legislation introduced by the government. The changes in this act bring the jurisdiction of the Wheat Board more closely under the control of the minister or the government. This is in direct contrast to the desires of the people who are affected by it, mainly prairie grain producers.

There is a general feeling, and rightly so, that had the Wheat Board been more accountable to producers, it would have done a much better and more aggressive job of selling our grain products. As things stand, decisions are left to the minister responsible for the Wheat Board; it is he who has power to make decisions. We saw an example of this a week ago when the minister decided to introduce enabling legislation bringing flax, rye and rapeseed under the control of the Wheat Board. This, I suggest, is in direct conflict with the wishes of the producers and the marketing groups involved. We shall have more to say on this subject when we come to the proposed amendments to the Wheat Board Act.

Getting back to the bill, I would like the minister to give a more complete explanation for the advance payment rate of 66½ per cent. Why and how was this rate decided on? The chief feature of the bill is that the per bushel rate of payment is to be on the same basis as the per bushel rate of advance. This, as has been mentioned before, is commendable because producers must not be caught in the same predicament as they were in past years. The emergency advance payments for drying grain, the advance for unthreshed grain and all the other amendments to the legislation are of no consequence if we do not intend to adopt a positive marketing approach. That is really the critical point.

The key note which should persist throughout all agricultural recommendations is that the government should intelligently assist in achieving an orderly and planned transition which would encourage agriculture to adjust and achieve the largest possible gains at the lowest possible tangible and intangible costs. I believe the government should reduce its direct involvement in agriculture, thus encouraging farmers, farm organizations and agribusiness to improve their management and leadership functions and be more self-sufficient.

The organizational structure of agriculture both in government and in the private sector should be rationalized. Canadian grain marketing bodies need to look into trade promotion and trade development. Support and encouragement must be given to joint endeavours by farm groups, by federal and provincial governments, by trade