

Prairie Grain Stabilization Act

farmers to put the land into forage and not leave it in a crop which fails all the time?

Mr. Benjamin: What it cost grain growers under PFAA with a 1 per cent deduction does not come anywhere near what it would cost per acre under crop insurance in the grain growing areas, particularly in the gumbo country of southern Saskatchewan. The minister knows this. He should not try to kid us that crop insurance will replace PFAA until he has crop insurance legislation to offer. The minister has not yet settled anything with the three Prairie provinces, or with any of the provinces for that matter, with regard to a crop insurance program. If he had, I am sure he would be rushing in here to tell us about it. In fact, he would be rushing into the Commonwealth room to do so. Until the federal government is prepared to do a hell of a lot more about the cost of an all-risk crop insurance program, the cancellation of PFAA will in fact be a loss to grain growers.

The minister professes to be in favour of maintaining people on family farms. Yet the most efficient, the most energetic farmer you can imagine, the man with the most initiative, the man who has diversified, who has specialized, who has increased his acreage, who took the minister's advice in connection with operation Lift, has his back to the wall. I am not talking about some friendly farmer or so-called farmer who is owned by the hon. member for Fraser Valley East (Mr. Pringle). I am not talking about the kind of farmer who is owned lock, stock and barrel by some friendly packing plant. I am not talking about the fellow who farms for a hobby. I am talking about grain growers whose families have farmed for two or three generations, who have achieved an economic size. The price they receive per bushel does not meet what it cost them to pay for their land and equipment and earn a living.

The minister proposes a stabilization fund which still is inadequate. He perpetuates what every government prior to this one has done. He says: Canadian grain growers will sell their grain in competition with the treasuries of the United States, France, Argentina, Australia and other countries. If we can get \$1.50 a bushel with no interim or final payment, this government says "fair ball". But, Mr. Speaker, in 1949 farmers got \$1.75. Name me another industry which has suffered a decline of this proportion in the price of the product it has to sell. If the minister is the champion of rural Canada, he should be placing his constituency and his job on the line right now.

If he really means business he will get the support of every Prairie member in this House. If he really means business, he will say: From now on, the whole of Canada will do something about carrying a share of production costs. We carry a share of costs when uranium, textiles or some other product is concerned. But when it comes to grain, the Prime Minister and the Minister of Finance (Mr. Benson) say we cannot have any new money. And the minister will not get any new money. None of the money which will go into the stabilization fund or into so-called transitional payments will be new money. Over the next three years, and I hope I am wrong in this

[Mr. Lang.]

prediction, because if I am maybe the farmers will gain a few million dollars—

Mr. Lang: You are wrong.

Mr. Benjamin: I hope so, but I shall need to hear a lot more from the minister before I will believe it. So will more than 100,000 permit holders. They will have to hear a lot more from the minister before they will believe it.

Mr. Speaker, this represents a transition for the government. It involves getting out of what should rightfully be a responsibility of the nation as a whole. It implies placing a greater share of the burden on the backs of the grain growers themselves. One can make this plea for a lot of other sections of our society; we just happen to have this one in front of us at the moment.

• (9:50 p.m.)

If the minister meant what he said on May 7, he will persuade the Prime Minister, his cabinet colleagues and the member of his caucus that there is not another industry of any shape or form in Canada that has had a drop in net income such as the grain industry and farmers have suffered. There is not another industry in Canada that has lost over half its employees—at least, not an industry that counts for anything in the economy.

I do not want to be sentimental. If the quarter-section farmer has gone and the little hamlet of 50 people has gone, it's too late. But when thousands of farmers leave and many Prairie communities become ghost towns—the minister has some in his riding with vacant stores, vacant houses, towns where once there were five farm machinery dealers and now only one or two, with no station agents, and so on—that is a different matter. I do not know how often the minister goes around these towns, but I would be glad to show him some in his own riding.

If the minister meant what he said, he will persuade his colleagues to accept the proposition that the nation as a whole is responsible for the preservation of primary production. It is wrong to repeal the Temporary Wheat Reserves Act. Not that the Temporary Wheat Reserves Act in itself is good, but I agree with the minister that we are doing the thing backwards. Surely the minister can say to his colleagues and the nation, and have the support of agriculture if not of his colleagues, that we should establish a national granary concept where the government and people of Canada maintain—pick your figure, 150 million, 200 million bushels of grain in store at terminal elevators, and over and above that the farmers pay the storage, which is just the reverse of what the government has been doing.

What happens in our export markets is something of concern to the nation as a whole. If we are worried about the textile workers or automobile workers, is it not equally valid to be worried about grain production and our export markets? If the United States treasury or the treasuries of countries like Australia, France and Argentina ruin price agreements—I do not fault the Minister of Agriculture or the minister in charge of the Wheat Board