

Withholding of Grain Payments

and a statement of claim against the government to collect the money for which the Wheat Board has issued an invoice. The government knew perfectly well the Wheat Board would not do it or go to the court and ask for a mandamus.

The government knew that the person—I use the term “person” in the legal sense—to whom under the act the money was to go directly was the Wheat Board, and that it could therefore with impunity sit back and not pay it. That is a cowardly act because it is the farmers not the Wheat Board, not the minister in charge of the Wheat Board, not the Minister of Justice (Mr. Turner) or the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) who suffer. It is the farmers who suffer. In the last few years, because of government policy, the farmers have been placed in the worst financial bind they have been in for years and are now denied the money this Parliament voted them under the Temporary Wheat Reserves Act. The government keeps this money without even batting an eyelash and is brave about it, as the minister in charge of the Wheat Board wanted to be. It is possible that this government will get away with this in the long run. I hope not. I hope the Assiniboia by-election will be the first instance in which the government will learn its lesson, and that the voters in that constituency, for whomever else they may vote, will vote against the government candidate because of this kind of shabby action.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Lewis: But it is possible that the government may get away with it. I am somewhat of a student of history, as all of us are, and I have seen governments get away with a great deal. As the Prime Minister once said in his preincarnation before his present position of arrogance and power—I am not quoting but this is a correct representation—everytime anybody is deprived of a part of his right the whole of society suffers. I say to the government that what we are considering now is action by a government which is in breach of the law, which can be described as defalcation, theft or contempt of the law, and when the government acts in that way it is an indication to every citizen in the country to look with less respect upon Parliament and with less respect upon government in general. The people of Canada should look with disrespect on this government. But that is not the issue. The painful fact about this kind of behaviour is that it does not hurt merely the government in power but throws a shadow over all democratic government.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Lewis: The painful fact about this kind of behaviour is not merely that one, two or three people were guilty of a misdemeanour but that when this behaviour is exercised by a government despite its attention having been drawn by Members of Parliament to the misdemeanour, a question mark is placed against democracy itself by the young people in Canada. Like young people all over the world, they have become disenchanted with the democratic process because it has been slow in producing peace, in producing justice, in producing human equality and in ridding us of the twists and turns that have beset our society. It has been slow in all these areas. We have to admit it has been slow, but we can still say, as I believe,

[Mr. Lewis.]

that democracy is the best way even though a little slow. However, it has been slow in many of these areas and the young people in Canada in large numbers have become disenchanted with the democratic process because of its slowness, because of its failure, because of its rifts and its divisions.

What will the young people say when they read and hear what has been said, and realize that there is a law on the books requiring the Minister of Finance to pay monthly since August 1, 1970 an amount which has been requested by the Canadian Wheat Board and with respect to which the government has deliberately refused to pay a penny every single month since August 1, 1970. That law does not say the minister may; it does not set out any conditions or any circumstances. This section of the act contains as clear and forthright a statement as can be. It simply provides, without reading the whole of section 3:

The Minister of Finance shall, out of the Consolidated Revenue Fund, pay to the Board for each day in that crop year an amount equal—

And later, it continues:

(b) in respect of any subsequent crop year—

That is subsequent to August 1, 1955.

—the total amount payable for the crop year shall be paid in equal monthly payments within such crop year.

I happen to be a lawyer by profession, but one does not have to be a lawyer to understand that clear language. For once, the people who drafted that particular law did not use legalese. It is almost English, as I read it. There is no doubt as to what it says. It says that the Minister of Finance (Mr. Benson) shall pay out of the Consolidated Revenue Fund a certain sum of money, the calculation of which is also made clear. It says that the Minister of Finance shall pay each month in that crop year one twelfth of the amount of money. There is no doubt as to what it says. What possible reason can the government have for not paying it, except its absolutely unlimited self assurance and arrogance that it can do as it pleases and get away with it because it has those rows of men who are governed by their loyalty to a party and to the bag man of the party rather than any loyalty of conscience.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce (Mr. Allmand) is rising on a question of privilege.

Mr. Allmand: Mr. Speaker, I ask the hon. member to withdraw the accusation he made by saying that we are supporting the government because of some loyalty to a bag man. I reject that entirely. I support this government because I support its policies.

Mr. Lewis: I was not talking in general about hon. members opposite supporting the government. I assume that members opposite support the government because they support its policies. I give them credit for at least that much. But I cannot understand how any person on the other side can with conscience permit the government which leads that party to break the law and yet not open his mouth.