

Western Grain Stabilization Act

those Bills passed without debate. If you will not pass those Bills without debate, we will not deal with the Western Grain Stabilization Act." That is an absolute blackmail of the farmers and producers of western Canada. Therefore, we agreed to limited debate because we were concerned for the western grain producers who needed the money.

I will not read from the press release put out in Winnipeg by the two Ministers as I have intended because the Hon. Minister who introduced the Bill has indicated that it is now the Government's intention to make an interim payment shortly after July 31. That is something for which we on this side of the House have been asking for months, because the farmer needs the money now. We welcome the statement of the Minister that a payment will be made.

While looking at the press release to which I referred and listening to the Minister who introduced the Bill, it was interesting to note that the Government is talking about a payment totalling approximately \$300 million or, as is indicated on page 3 of the press release, a payment of more than \$5,000 to a participating producer who has contributed the maximum levies in the past three years. However, it was also said that there would be an average amount paid of about \$2,500.

There is almost \$1 billion in the fund, Mr. Speaker. The maximum contribution of the producers over the past number of years has amounted to \$1,200 a year. As the Hon. Member for Assiniboia pointed out, if a producer took the contributions of \$1,200 a year that he has made to the fund since the last pay-out in 1979, added them all together and worked out the bank interest, the producer would find that if he had put that money into a bank account, he would now have close to \$8,000. What is the Government proposing? It is proposing a pay-out of approximately \$5,000. The producer is not even receiving back what he himself contributed.

It is a little unusual that this is so because the program under the Western Grain Stabilization Act is one of the few that is contributory. The producer contributes to the fund. Most programs are paid for by the Government only. For example, the Agricultural Stabilization Act which refers to products other than those handled by the Wheat Board has a very simple formula for payment out. There is no contribution to that fund by the producer; the payments come from the Treasury. The Agricultural Stabilization Act results in an annual pay-out to the dairy, fruit and vegetable industries in eastern Canada of over \$350 million. There are no contributions to the fund by the producers.

The farmer in western Canada is happy to contribute to a plan if that plan is one which will pay him money at a time when he needs it. He needs that money now because he is putting in his crop and he has expenses for fuel, fertilizer, seed and repairs. We cannot expect the merchants in the small towns to finance the producers when they put in their crops because the small businessmen who supply fuel and fertilizer to the producers are just as strapped as the farmers. Those businessmen must borrow money from the bank at interest rates of 15 per cent, 16 per cent or maybe even 20 per cent.

As I have said, the pay-out is needed now. While I am pleased to hear the Minister say that there will be a pay-out by around the end of July, I feel that that is a little bit late for the producer and the small businessman. We on this side of the House asked that that payment be made, as did all of the farm organizations and farm leaders across the country. Although we welcome this amendment, it is unfortunate that the payment was not made a month ago.

● (1410)

When the Bill was originally brought in by the Hon. Otto Lang, he said that it was a Bill which would trigger a payment early in the spring before the producer put in his crop. That did not happen. I could give you the reasons why that did not happen; however, my time is running out.

We on this side of the House support the Bill, but we may have one or two amendments which we would like to put forward. The whole question of stabilization should be examined. It should be discussed co-operatively with the farm organizations and the producers. The producers want and need a stabilization program. I would suggest that they do not want hand-outs. They would prefer a program which is actuarially sound. Unless such a program is developed, I can visualize that by 1986, with the opting out provisions, many of the farmers today who are participants in the plan will opt out. There will be very few farmers left in the plan.

However, there is one bright light in the future—an election is imminent. This, I suggest, will result in a change of government. It will be a government which will be sensitive to the needs and problems of the agricultural community. It will be a government that will co-operate with producers and farm organizations and will develop a program that will effectively deal with the serious problems in agriculture.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Herbert): There follows a ten-minute period for question and comments. Are Members rising to put questions? If not, for continuing debate, the Hon. Member for Red Deer (Mr. Towers).

Mr. Gordon Towers (Red Deer): Mr. Speaker, one of the first things which I would like to say is that I appreciate the efforts of the Minister for External Relations (Mr. Pepin) who has sat in this House for the second Friday in a row attempting to pass Bills through the House which will be of some assistance to prairie grain producers. When the Minister mentioned that he was standing in for the Minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board as well as for the Minister responsible for Agriculture, I am glad that he did not say that he was standing in for a responsible Minister, because neither one of them is responsible to prairie farmers. They have proven beyond reasonable doubt that this Government, with its succession of Ministers who have represented western agriculture, has not fulfilled the commission which is required.

We appreciate the Minister for External Relations and the efforts that he has gone to in attempting to assist western grain growers. He said earlier that he understands their problems and I believe he does. Certainly he did an excellent job during