

Prairie Grain Stabilization Act

Many people, the majority of whom have means and do not have to try to live on a modest income, have suggested that we should consolidate farm units into those of more efficient size. I suggest that rural Canada today is still the best place in the world to bring up a family. I also suggest that in rural Canada you do not find the kind of problems which are facing our large urban areas. When the minister talks about the adjustment of farm units to a more efficient size he should also take into consideration the amount of money being spent in urban centres to try to meet changing conditions. In effect, in talking about encouraging the adjustment of farm units to a more efficient size you are really talking about phasing out the small rural centre. The rural people of this country should be given the opportunity to examine the implications of the proposal made by the minister before deciding whether or not to support the so-called farm stabilization program, because you cannot talk about the one without talking about the other.

I suggest a deliberate attempt is being made to reduce the amount of grain in storage at elevators in order to avoid making payments under the Temporary Wheat Reserves Act. Perhaps not too many people can argue with that, but the fact remains that we should find out exactly what the minister and the cabinet mean by the elimination of the Temporary Wheat Reserves Act and whether or not there is a satisfactory substitute for the storage policy under that act. I can recite without hesitation the cost of storage facilities, and the minister knows that the sum to which he has referred as being sufficient for the average farmer, \$560, would not even come close to buying one storage facility to store the quantity of grain that the agricultural producer will have to store on his own premises once the Temporary Wheat Reserves Act is repealed.

On February 26 an inquiry of the ministry was tabled. It asked, first of all, whether payments were being made on a monthly basis to the Canadian Wheat Board under the provisions of the Temporary Wheat Reserves Act; secondly, if so, whether the payments were still being made; and thirdly, if not, why not? If the government were on its toes, and the Canadian Wheat Board—which provides the answer to this type of question—and the people in the department realized the implications behind the question, an answer would have been furnished by this time, but I am still waiting.

We all realize that there must be a maximum normal carryover of all grains in position, at government cost. If this government intends to go into the wheat exporting business, there is no question that we have an obligation to ensure that grain will be in position for export to our overseas customers. I have heard statements made in this House that criticize the Canadian Wheat Board. As far as I am concerned, if more politicians would keep their cotton-picking fingers out of the Canadian Wheat Board's operations we would be a lot better off. It appears to me there are too many regulations, too many bureaucrats and too many people lacking practical knowledge condemning the Canadian Wheat Board to the extent that it cannot do its job.

[Mr. Skoberg.]

The Canadian Wheat Board is in a position to know exactly what is required by way of grain exports. I recommend to the minister that when he has finished reading his novel the government should give the Canadian Wheat Board the tools to do the job. Let the board travel the world and do a proper job of selling our grain. I have seen too many brokerage firms trying to sell our grain today. I believe the Canadian Wheat Board can do the job if given the tools.

In closing, I urge the government, and particularly this minister, to reconsider the bill. Once again the minister should remember that he cannot gain political favour with the farmers of this nation by suggesting that they should accept this \$100 million—\$560 for each individual producer—with the rest of the legislation. If he separated that part of the bill there should not be any problem in taking a realistic look at the legislation before the House.

• (8:40 p.m.)

Mr. Don Mazankowski (Vegreville): Mr. Speaker, since the announcement of this program in October last most members of the House and many farmers across western Canada have been waiting rather anxiously for their legislation hoping that an effective measure might be incorporated in it in order to cope with continuing deterioration in the prairie grain economy. Unfortunately, it is rather questionable whether this measure will be very helpful in the long run. Obviously the government has high hopes for it, because it seems that every question directed to the minister in charge of the Wheat Board in the last six months respecting the prairie grain industry has been answered by reference to the legislation coming forth under the stabilization program.

It would be a gross oversimplification to suggest that this bill will cure all the ills of the prairie grains industry. On the contrary, it is conceivable that within three years the results of this bill will only add to the already long list of producers who have fallen by the wayside. It is no surprise that this bill is in close conformity with the bureaucratic, complicated red-tape programs that have preceded it.

Before dealing with the bill specifically I think in all fairness one has to take exception to the comments made by the minister in his press release of May 7, charging opposition members with deliberately working against the prairie agricultural industry. He went on to say that if this continued it would cost the western farmers \$100 million this year. I ask you, Mr. Speaker, is this supposed to be some kind of a threat? The farmers understand this bill very well. They are not going to be taken in by this kind of gimmick. They certainly will not be bought off that easily, in spite of the fact they are now suffering very severe hardship.

I do not believe it is wrong to rise in this House of Commons and inform hon. members of the desperate plight, which is growing, in the west. This is our responsibility. Many members of this House come from western Canada and feel very strongly about agriculture and the legislative measures being introduced, ostensibly to assist the industry. We are in very close contact with the producers out there and know their reaction. It is