

*Withholding of Grain Payments*

minister. They want to know exactly what he is talking about and why he is not obeying the law as laid down in the Temporary Wheat Reserves Act. We are all well aware that it did not take the minister long to get out that seven cent payment. It was announced one day and in the mail the next. Now he has suggested that he is prepared to go to jail for the farmers. At the time he put the payment out he realized that wheat had dropped 20 cents a bushel compared with two years earlier. In fact, on August 1 it was 3 cents a bushel less.

To try to suggest that we on this side are playing politics when the government introduces that type of operation is a defamation of the word, to say the least. I am sure that all members on this side of the House are concerned about what is happening to the farm economy. We are also concerned about the fact that cash is needed on the farm. We on this side have tried our utmost to have this so-called stabilization plan based on net income. In no way will the government accept that type of proposal. The government is well aware that in the whole of the post-war period we have the lowest net income ever on the farm.

We have tried to get the government to take action on the price of farm machinery. Tonight the minister said that he would go to jail for the farm population, but he still will not initiate an investigation under the Combines Investigation Act into the price of farm machinery. He knows the farmer is being completely fleeced in this respect. If this government were concerned about the farmer and the farm economy it would do something to improve the situation.

I had to laugh when the minister congratulated the members on his side of the House who come from the Atlantic provinces and the west coast for putting up with this debate. Surely the minister must realize that the agricultural and fishing economies are the most important industries in this country. They are the backbone of the Canadian economy. Surely the minister realizes that over 80 per cent of the people are directly or indirectly connected with these two industries. He thanked the members from other parts of the country for putting up with a debate on one of the two most important industries in this country, farming and fishing. The members on this side from Atlantic Canada are fully aware of the problems in their industry. They are very similar to the problems affecting the agricultural industry in the western provinces.

Those who are sincere about this situation know that the laws made in this House of Commons should not be broken. This is my first session here. I did not think it was possible for a government to say that even though a law is on the statute books of Canada, they can break that law and nothing will happen to them. The hon. member for Hillsborough (Mr. Macquarrie) dealt with that point. I did not think it was possible to take shortcuts in order to accomplish something.

The money that is now owing to the farmers of this country should be paid immediately. There is no use arguing with this government. If the government is prepared to break the law, the people of this nation

[Mr. Skoberg.]

will stand up and be counted at the next election; they will let the government know what they think of these so-called shortcuts. The minister said that he is prepared to go to jail because he is taking this shortcut in order to help the farmers. This is more than a cheap political trick. These people should be going to jail because of the situation they have created.

If we look at the publications of the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool and other organizations we realize that our agricultural economy is worthy of support. The minister talks about what he has done for agriculture, but Canada is the only wheat exporting nation in the world that has to subsidize the treasuries of other nations. The minister brags about the great increase in farm production and export sales, but we know about the government's hesitation. Because of the cutback in concessional sales we lost markets. We realize that there are now some credit sales, but after a period of time they will be charged back to the pool. Other countries look after agricultural producers and provide protection for the people who are part of this industry.

They consider agriculture to be an asset to their countries, but not this government. They just do what they want and pretend they are helping the producers. Surely, the government realizes it has an obligation to live up to these laws. Surely it realizes that what it is doing right now can only be considered one of the worst things that can happen to a nation. I was amazed to hear the hon. member for Joliette (Mr. La Salle) stand in his place and say what he did. Surely, he was not suggesting we do away with existing statutes. If this is the situation it becomes truly dangerous to allow any bill to be given first reading, since it might have an effect on existing statutes and in this case it could have an effect on various areas throughout the country.

**Mr. David MacDonald (Egmont):** As an eastern member, it has not been my custom to speak on matters relating to western agriculture. In the case of my hon. friend from Hillsborough, not only does he not usually speak on western agriculture, he does not represent what is normally considered to be an agricultural riding. But there are two factors which compel me to take part in this important debate. One is that I do represent an agricultural riding. And I believe the problems of western agriculture are indivisible from those of agriculture generally across this country.

It is an obvious fact, that the government has proved both unable and unwilling to face the real problems of agriculture and is continuing in many cases to turn toward its own plans and programs, which in most instances have little to do with the real needs which pertain in the agricultural industry. It is high time members from all parts of the country and on all sides of the House expressed themselves openly and directly with regard to this subject. The cost-price squeeze and other difficulties affecting western agriculture can be repeated time and again with respect to the agriculture situation in eastern Canada.

In addressing the House this evening, I rise not just because agriculture is affected but because there is a