

Prairie Grain Advance Payments Act

In my area some farmers were left out of the Lift program and suffered loss of income even though they applied to the so-called experts. Due to the late spring and fall in 1969, wheat acreage in Manitoba dropped considerably. In other words, Manitoba farmers did in 1969 what farmers in Saskatchewan and Alberta did in 1970; they reduced their wheat acreage. In recognition of the 1969 drop in wheat acreage and of the unfairness in taking only 1969 as the yardstick, the department, the minister and the Wheat Board agreed to allow 1968 to be used. In brief, the agricultural representatives, or ag reps as they are known everywhere in western Canada, and other people in the Manitoba Department of Agriculture met with the officials who were administering the Lift regulations and most of them were under the impression, particularly one in my area, that if 1968 wheat acres were to be used then the 1969 summerfallow and forage acres had to be used.

This went on all through the summer of 1970 and farmers who were working under the Lift program and hoping to benefit relied on this. However, a problem arose and was referred to the department for a ruling and a ruling was made in November or December, 1970, that if 1968 wheat acres were to be used then the 1968 acres of summerfallow and forage also had to be used. Farmers who were under the impression that the 1969 summerfallow and forage acres had to be used had planned their 1970 crops and plantings on that basis, but now sadly found they were out of luck. A good many of them were out as much as \$300 or \$400. Many of them were farmers who could have planted rapeseed and done much better by doing so. I suspect there are still some farmers who are unaware that they were eligible to use their 1968 summerfallow and forage acres and as a result have not applied.

I am sure that the Lift officials, who have been most helpful in making sure that those who qualified have received the utmost attention, are aware of this situation, but I deplore the fact that the ruling was not made until November. It should have been made before March or April of 1970. For this reason, again I urge the minister to supply people taking cash advances with an explanatory folder or other document to prevent unnecessary mistakes being made and consequently unnecessary suffering for individuals. I hope answers will be given to some of these questions in the committee. I also think that improvements can be made to the bill.

Mr. Jack McIntosh (Swift Current-Maple Creek): Mr. Speaker, I do not intend to speak at length on this bill. I can well imagine the thoughts that are going through your mind as well as the thoughts of hon. members whose constituencies are not greatly concerned with agriculture. It may seem strange to a number of hon. members who represent urban ridings that we on this side of the House seem to be opposing most of the agricultural legislation that the government is putting before parliament.

Hon. members have heard my colleagues say today that there are many good features in Bill C-239 regarding

[Mr. Ritchie.]

cash advances for farmers. It is right that they should say that, because in the first place this legislation was put on the books by a Conservative government at a time when the Liberals said it could not be done. It was done and it did work. But I am at variance to a slight degree with some of my colleagues because, if I understood the minister correctly, this bill does impose another restriction on the farmer.

• (5:00 p.m.)

In the first place, the government has control of what the grain farmer sells, and later I will have something to say about the cattle industry and this government's legislation in that regard. As most people here and anybody who reads the newspapers know, the grain farmers have had many problems. Coming from the area he does, the minister is in an ideal position to realize that and he must know that the problems are the result of the agricultural legislation introduced by the present government. When I read this bill it seems to me that the minister is handing out a few kudos but is changing the agreement with the farmers in regard to cash advances which were satisfactory to the farmers, to make them demand notes.

As any businessman knows, one of the prime requisites of establishing a business is operating capital. Without this he would be bankrupt. It may well be that this government is endeavouring to bankrupt people engaged in agriculture. Their whole agricultural policy is based on the idea that agriculture in Canada must be reduced. The reason I say this is because with state control, which I think all this legislation is directed toward, production can be controlled to the markets you want. However, I do not think this is what our western farmers want.

The explanatory note of this bill reads:

This amendment is consequential on the proposed change in the rate of interest payable on an advance payment in certain circumstances from a fixed rate of 6 per cent to a top rate prescribed for the crop year in which the advance payment was made.

Is this prescribed rate a bank rate, an international, stabilized rate or is it a rate set by some bureaucrat in Ottawa? There are many clauses in the bill which relate to interest. The minister has said, and I assume this to be the case, the main part of the bill is an adjustment of interest and method of payment. It must be remembered that it is through no fault of their own that farmers cannot pay the interest and principal. They have the grain stacked up to the eaves, but because this government is negligent in getting rid of that grain the farmers are without a cash return. I blame the government because, unlike other countries, they have control of the marketing of grain and have accepted that responsibility. We know that markets exist and wonder why they are not selling the grain. Surely the government's policy should be oriented toward marketing and production, not reduction.

The minister has tried to tell us that there are no markets for our grain. In a moment I shall ask him whether this government has turned down any sales this