

Canada Grain Act

The original intention of the Canadian Grain Commission was to find the best people with the best backgrounds in the grains business.

● (1130)

I do not have any strong objection to the background of the Hon. Member for Lisgar (Mr. Murta) to fill the position. However, I think that it is not necessary to make it a sinecure, which is the effect of this particular amendment.

There have been a few political appointees to the Canadian Grain Commission before. Generally, they were defeated candidates appointed by previous Liberal Governments and by previous Conservative Governments. It has become a sort of Senate of the western Canadian grains industry. Yet, for the most part, those appointees have been people with adequate background to do a good job of serving on the commission. There was no need prior to now, and I think there is no need now, to make those sinecures unassailable for at least five years and, upon good behaviour, a reappointment for a further five years.

George Leith was a former Member of the Legislature in Saskatchewan under the Thatcher Liberals. I believe he was a cabinet Minister for a brief time. He served honourably and well on the Canadian Grain Commission.

Years ago Forrest Hetland, who is now a member of the Canadian Wheat Board, served on the Grain Commission. He was considered to be something of a political appointee although I do not believe that he ever sought office. It was his father who had served as a Member of Parliament.

The tendency of Governments has been to appoint supporters to the commission. The recent appointment which went in reverse was a Diefenbaker appointment. I refer to the former Member of Parliament for Swift Current—Maple Creek, Mr. Frank Hamilton, who was a defeated candidate and who got his appointment that way. He then came back into politics and served as a Member of this House until his retirement at the end of the 1984 Session of Parliament.

The tradition of political appointees is not what we are opposed to in this particular motion, although I cannot particularly condone it, as long as the appointees are people who know the business. However, I think it is going a little too far when one ties the hands of all future Governments and future Ministers to the tradition of making those appointments at the pleasure of the Minister. To my recollection there has not been a practice by Ministers of the Crown to dispose of these appointees to the Grain Commission immediately upon taking office. Their appointments, if they are competent people, are relatively secure. I see no need for this particular amendment that the Government has put into these amendments to the Canadian Grain Act which would permit its appointees to hold the office during good behaviour, for at least five years.

I support the motion moved by my friend from Prince Albert which would delay the coming into force of this particular amendment until January 1, 1990, which is just beyond the longest possible mandate that this Government can have. Since we have been unable to have the clause deleted entirely, that would be the second choice.

Mr. Geoff Wilson (Swift Current—Maple Creek): Mr. Speaker, very briefly, I wish to oppose the motion that has been brought forward by the Hon. Member. I do so as Chairman of the Standing Committee on Agriculture which, over the past several weeks, has studied these proposals in detail and made recommendations to the House.

The essence of the Canada Grain Act is that we have a set of commissioners whose responsibility it is to ensure the integrity of the grading system and the sampling system in Canada, and to ensure that Canada's reputation as a supplier of quality wheat and quality grains to the rest of the world remains intact.

A number of responsible farm organizations in the western Prairies have suggested to me, and I am sure to other members of the committee, that the best way to ensure the integrity of the grain commissioners is to give them a modest term of, say, seven years, in order that they have some security of tenure. In this way if they will be going to the expense of moving their families and setting up house in Winnipeg they can be reasonably assured that the job would endure for that length of time. Therefore they would be more independent and not subject to the whims of, perhaps, a particular Deputy Minister, or to a particular political pressure of the day. They would in fact have the independence required of such a responsible position in order to carry out the thrust of the Act which, after all, is to maintain the quality and integrity of Canada's grains and its reputation in the world market.

I cannot let the words of the Hon. Member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell (Mr. Boudria) pass unchallenged. Only a Liberal could stand in this House and make the sort of ridiculous representations that he made. Only a Liberal would have the nerve to do it. The last time there were any substantive amendments to the Canada Grain Act was in 1971 when the then Liberal Government changed the Act. At that time and prior to it commissioners were appointed for a 10-year term which, in fact, may be too long. I believe that a period of five to seven years is probably about right. But the fact is that the commissioners were appointed for 10-year terms and the Liberal Government of the day brought forward legislation to eliminate that 10-year term and change it to "at the pleasure" for the specific reason of getting rid of Frank Hamilton, to whom the Hon. Member for Humboldt—Lake Centre (Mr. Althouse) referred.

Mr. Hamilton was an expert in the grains field. He belonged to the commission for some eight years and was summarily dismissed by the Liberal Government as a result of its having played politics with the legislation and overturning it. I think that the Hon. Member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell and