

Wheat Acreage Reduction

for Assiniboia probably knows it better than I do—I think it is fair to say that if the minister's program is adopted on that kind of land, the gophers will be digging 20 feet in the air every time there is a dust storm. This program will not help the farmers to survive. The \$6 will not cover summer fallowing costs. That is not an incentive. If the minister is really anxious to get acreage taken out of wheat production he will make it worth their while. There are no other alternative crops. The minister said, "Do not grow anything else."

This whole program is a cheapskate attempt to get the government off the hook with wheat inventories. It lets the farmers foot the bill. This program will mitigate against good farming practice and land conservation. The payments per acre must be raised to a point at which it is a real incentive. If the minister were to follow the suggestion of the hon. member for Assiniboia he would be surprised how much more support he would receive. In fact, we would be glad to advertise the program and persuade the people to co-operate and participate in it, if he would make it a real incentive. I suspect that is a very fond hope and nothing will come of it.

From now on the Liberals will perpetuate this claim of a \$100 million program for western Canada. Even the minister admits that is only an estimate. That is a nice phrase for it; actually, it is only a figure off the top of his head. There is no way of knowing how much acreage will be taken out of wheat production. I will be surprised if the cost exceeds \$50 million or \$60 million.

From now until July Liberal spokesmen will be talking about the \$100 million program for western Canada. When the smoke is cleared and the government finds the figure is nowhere close to \$100 million, we will not hear any more about this program. The figure is phony because no one, including the minister, knows what the final figure will be. The suggestion of this amount being injected into western agriculture is the worst kind of attempt to delude and mislead the farmers of western Canada and the rest of the country.

There seems to be something basically immoral about paying people not to do something, such as paying good, practising agriculturists not to grow food. The day will come in two or three years when we will have no wheat. We will have to go through the same bit again. I support to some degree one area

of the program proposed by the minister. In fact, it is long overdue; it is something the people in my party were advocating long before I entered politics.

While the program does not go far enough, has not been carefully thought out and does not take into account the wide variety of problems farmers will face, it is at least a half-hearted entry into production planning, production control and market projection, although the market projections the minister gave us were nil for anything the farmers would plant instead of wheat. At least it is a start.

The government suggests this is only a one-year program. I hope from now on planning and research into agricultural commodities and markets will be done well in advance so that when announcements are made farmers can make an intelligent decision. It is easy for members of this House and agricultural experts to talk about diversifying. Diversifying to what? How much? What price? We may well be getting into the same situation we were faced with in the fifties when we were up to our eyeballs in wheat. Farmers were urged to diversify. Four years later we were up to our eyeballs in pork and beef. Then the pitch was to specialize, then to diversify, and then back to specialization. Now we are being told to diversify.

● (12:50 a.m.)

I hope this old-line government has learnt the lesson that this half-hearted and belated excursion into production planning and control has to be improved. A decision to back the industry with guaranteed prices and resources of the national treasury, of the nation as a whole, would arm the Wheat Board with the facilities which would enable it to compete in world markets. We could take on Australia, Argentina, France—we could take them all on at once if necessary. But I do not think that would be necessary, once they knew that our wheat growers had behind them the power and resources of our federal government. Hon. members would be surprised, I am sure, how quickly those nations would fall into line with regard to stable prices and no more price cutting.

I hope the minister will accept some of the suggestions made by his friends in this House, for example, those made by the hon. member for Assiniboia, even if he does not accept the advice which has been offered him from this side of the House. I think he should give much more by way of explanation to the