

influential and auspicious organization, for which there is no counterpart in Alberta or some of the other provinces. It is unique to Saskatchewan. Most of its pronouncements are worth reading and listening to.

I think it is worthwhile repeating in this debate how the Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities described this bill:

Whenever the net cash flow from grain sales drops below the previous five-year average, the fund will trigger a payment large enough to keep the total flow to the prairies of net cash from grain sales at the five-year average. Each participating producer will share in the payment in the ratio of his contributions in the current three-year period (the current year plus the previous two) to the total contributions of all participating producers.

I am sure all of us will admit that this is a very complicated bill and that it introduces formulae which will scare most farmers to death when trying to understand them, but I think the above quotation is a pretty concise statement of the intent of the bill. Certainly the bill's title is simple enough and gives no hint of the complicated formulae which are an integral part of it. Nevertheless, it is useful to ask what are the intentions of the bill.

● (1530)

I think it is appropriate to go back in history and comment on the first prairie grain stabilization bill introduced in 1970, and debated in 1971. Incidentally it was introduced by the same minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board. I hasten to point out that I was not a member of the House then, but was keenly aware of the controversy surrounding the bill because of the personal involvement of my predecessor from the Medicine Hat constituency, the former minister of agriculture. That first attempt at grain stabilization, as we know, was withdrawn at the second reading stage. It is fair to ask why. Perhaps we can learn a lesson from history, now that we are debating the same topic five years later.

It seems to me that the first and foremost reason was that there had been a lack of meaningful communication with prairie grain producers—I am not speaking of grain producers' organizations such as the Canadian Federation of Agriculture, the wheat pools, the National Farmers' Union and other provincial grain organizations, although I am sure their views were made loudly known. I am speaking about individual grain producers. I suggest there was a lack of communication with individual grain growers. There was no opportunity to meet them at public meetings, which should have been held in farm communities, to enable those in authority to hear some genuine discussion regarding the bill which was proposed some five years ago.

There were some other drawbacks. The compulsory aspects of that first bill must have been a real factor in the opposition of farmers to the bill. Originally farmers were to be compelled to join the scheme. That, at any rate, was the proposal. In addition, the bill was not to be regional in application; it did not take into account crop failures arising from drought, for example.

If this new bill is to gain widespread support in this House and on the part of farmers, we should learn from our experiences and the lessons of history which show why the first prairie grain stabilization bill of five years ago was not acceptable. I suggest that our first responsibil-

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ity is to take the bill to the farmers. We cannot expect them to come to Ottawa and appear before our standing committee. I know that various farm organizations will indeed be in Ottawa. They have been here recently, making representations on Bill C-50, the agricultural stabilization bill. But that is not enough. You cannot expect individual farmers to come here and tell it "like it is", in their own words. It is right and proper for various farm organizations to come here but, as I say, that is not good enough. There should also be provision for public meetings at which an issue as important as this can be discussed.

I spoke about my chief concern relating to the new bill. I am concerned because in the bill there is lack of provision for a regional approach to problems. Surely this is necessary, despite obvious administrative difficulties which a regional approach may entail. I make this point even though some, probably the minister included, will argue that this aspect can be covered with crop insurance.

Why do I feel so strongly about the need for a regional approach? Let me tell the House a story relating to my constituency in southeastern Alberta. What I will say will apply as well to southwestern Saskatchewan, as both areas are in the same geographic weather belt. Without question, the No. 1 hazard in the area is not grasshoppers, is not hail, is not frost;—

Mr. Benjamin: It is Liberals.

Mr. Hargrave: —is not insects; it is drought. Drought is an occupational hazard which has been with us ever since the first sod was turned. Like it or not, that corner of southeastern Alberta and southwestern Saskatchewan is known as the drought belt of Canada. Medicine Hat is often called the drought capital of Canada.

Let me tell an interesting story which members may want to hear. Many years ago the late Professor Evan Hardy was Professor of Agricultural Engineering at the University of Saskatchewan and I well remember how he said, in his large booming voice, why he came to the prairies from Iowa, his native state. He told the class that one day he had seen the map of North America, and across the southern portion of the prairies, where Canada is, was written the expression, "The Great American Desert." Obviously it was an old map; it may have been patterned after Palliser's work; I don't know. He said, "I must go and see the great American desert." So he visited the southern prairies and he said he was right under the "D" in the desert marked on the map. The way he told the story I have never forgotten. For those who live in the area, drought is an occupational hazard. In many respects we live in the great American desert and we are right under the "D".

I suggest that there is a connection between the hazards of grain growing in my area and conditions which give rise to the short grass ranching country in that same area. This is an area in which we produce cattle, because it is dry and semi-arid. If we had four or five inches more precipitation and ten inches less evaporation, we would be growing grain everywhere except where it is too rough. Grain growers face an extra hazard, in that spring seed bed cultivation and preparation brings about a severe loss of soil moisture, a loss that is not duplicated in the production of our native grass crop, a crop that in many years is