

Withholding of Grain Payments

table and prove to Canadians that we in Parliament are assuming our responsibilities towards both eastern and western Canada, and that we are trying to be wise, honest and fair towards all provinces. That is how we will achieve the unity which must prevail in Canada.

I for one, as a producer of eastern Canada and as a member, felt it my duty to support the demands contained in the motion and to associate myself with the hon. members who are willing to describe a disastrous situation for the producers of western Canada, without blaming nobody in that part of the country, but trying at the same time to make the government understand that there are also in eastern Canada problems which are generated by the prevailing situation in Western Canada.

● (9:10 p.m.)

Only last week I received representations from mill owners and co-op representatives who are unable to find supplies in a normal way and at competitive prices because of those that are set today on the international market. The result of this is increased production costs for eastern producers who in turn will have to turn to the federal government and ask for special legislation in order to get the protection that will allow them to derive reasonable income from their farm or herd operations.

If we all make a serious attempt here in Parliament to find the proper solutions to our agricultural problems, and this without discriminating against any area of this country, we will be known as men of responsibilities, and this is sure to be felt among the population. This will enable us to continue building a better country in which to live and where all social classes, the farmers included, will get their fair share of the national income.

For this reason I support the motion and I ask the government to take the necessary steps to bring justice to our grain producers in western Canada.

[English]

Hon. Otto E. Lang (Minister of Manpower and Immigration): Mr. Speaker this debate began with a motion which re-cited, in the first place, a serious income problem among farmers in western Canada. There is no doubt at all about the seriousness of that problem. It is for that reason that I witness here tonight, with particular regret, a continuation of the attempt by hon. members opposite, particularly the prairie members among the Conservatives and NDP, to make political capital out of the plight of the western farmer.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Lang: They attempt in this House to block and filibuster every measure that is brought forward to help the prairie farmer, and in committee they do the same. Then out on the prairies they take credit, on the one hand, for stopping some imaginary plan of the government's and, on the other hand, they blame the government for not acting on and proceeding with the very legislation which they block in this House and prevent from going through. Prairie members among the Conservatives and NDP also make it a full-time occupation to

[Mr. Lambert (Bellechasse).]

go among the farmers and spread gloom and doom in every way they know. The problems of the prairie farmer are very real in a world of low grain prices, subsidized competition and rising costs, without the doom and gloom spreaders working among the farmers to create additional feelings of despair.

I have nothing but contempt for those who, having heard the government time and time again say in this House that it is going to do everything it can to make the agricultural industry as efficient and as effective as possible for as many prairie farmers as possible, then go to the prairie regions and talk about some government plan for taking farmers off the farms. As I said, I have nothing but contempt for that kind of doom and gloom, this spreading of despair and deceit.

One of the things which caused the greatest difficulty for the prairie farmer was that over the years government after government had been afraid to tackle problems relating to agriculture. They had been afraid because they worked on a simple political maxim which was far too simple, namely, that doing nothing is far safer than trying to do something to correct a difficult problem.

Since my association with this government and my connection with this particular problem I have been determined—and my colleagues were ready, fully, to join with me in this—to try to tackle the problem and solve it, so that when we had finished the attempt the situation would be better than before, so that in legislating there might be left in years to come some improvements, whether in the quota system, the system of stabilization or the Market Development Fund, which would be permanent. What we want to do is to put the acreage of the prairies to better use.

The hon. member for Calgary North (Mr. Woolliams) went through a litany of what the Conservatives had done for the prairie farmer over their many years in office. He found two items: the Wheat Board and cash advances. He did not remember to say that the Conservatives in their day had indeed set up the Wheat Board but had left it as a mere puff without power until the Liberal government gave it some power and gave it the ability to sell farmers' grain.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Lang: I quite agree with him about the merits of the cash advance system. In fact, the one thing that I can find in the Conservative record which remained to help the prairie farmer more than a year or so after it had been legislated and put into existence is the cash advance measure. Of course, in the case of the cash advance we found it and we doubled it.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Lang: Members of the opposition in recent weeks have been reacting with surprise to the fact that it is the intention of this government to repeal the Temporary Wheat Reserves Act as of July 31, 1970. We indicated our