

*Prairie Grain Stabilization Act*

rie grain sale proceeds and to repeal or amend certain related statutes, as reported (with amendments) from the Standing Committee on Agriculture, and motions Nos. 1 and 2 of Mr. Gleave (page 7252).

**Mr. R. R. Southam (Qu'Appelle-Moose Mountain):** Mr. Speaker, in opening my remarks this afternoon on the amendments to Bill C-244, which is now before the House, I should like to remind hon. members of the statement made by the House leader of our party early last summer when this bill was introduced, to the effect that if the government would agree to make a distribution of the amount provided for in the bill by way of a transitional payment, and deal with the matter by way of a supplementary estimate, the party to which I belong would be prepared to pass it within half an hour and get the money into the hands of the farmers.

With respect to the two amendments which are before us in connection with this very controversial and questionable bill, may I say I support them because any amendment introduced by the Official Opposition or by other parties in the Commons would, no doubt, if accepted by the government, make this legislation more palatable and more effective as far as western agriculture is concerned. I should like to ask the minister responsible for the Wheat Board what motivated the government in bringing the bill back to the House at this particular time, despite the fact that the Minister of Finance (Mr. Benson) has been telling all and sundry that his tax bill was to have complete priority? Was it because during the summer recess, when the minister had the opportunity to check more closely on public opinion in the west, he finally realized the seriousness of the economic plight which our farmers are facing? Or was it because the government has at least become aware of the outrageous and deeply questionable position in which they have placed themselves by failing to meet the requirements of the law through their decision to withhold payment of some \$87.6 million presently owing to the Wheat Board under the terms of the Temporary Wheat Reserves Act? Or is it because the dark shadow of the Assiniboia by-election, perhaps even of a general election, is casting a pall of gloom over the Liberal party in western Canada? Whatever the reason, I am more than surprised that the minister should not have learned his lesson, if not during the summer recess, then in recent days in the Commons. I had hoped he would return ready to present us with realistic amendments to the bill which would make the bill more acceptable to the western farmers.

In order to refresh our memories, let us read the title of the bill and the text of the two amendments we are debating. The bill is described as "An Act respecting the Stabilization of Prairie Grain Sale Proceeds" and to repeal or amend certain related statutes. The two amendments we are considering read as follows:

1. That Bill C-244... be amended by adding the following to paragraph (c) of subclause (1) of clause 2 after the word "producer" in line 18 at page one: "and after the deduction of the increased costs of production and including stabilization payments, if any;"

2. That Bill C-244... be amended by deleting the words "amount that is 90 per cent of the" (a) from paragraph (a) of subclause (1) of clause 3 at lines 31 and 32 at page 2 (b) from paragraph (b) of subclause (1) of clause 3 at lines 4 and 5 at page 3.

[Mr. Speaker.]

This sounds complicated, Mr. Speaker, but it is pertinent to the economic welfare of western Canada. With regard to the word "stabilization" in the title of the bill, I wish to emphasize that this should mean an economically viable agriculture industry. This is the point around which a lot of the contentious debate revolves. Farmers ought not to be offered stabilization at poverty level as the bill in its present form would bring about. It is with this objective that the hon. member to my left has brought in these amendments and this is why I, as a member of the agriculture committee, feel duty bound to rise and support them.

I was amused by the remark of the hon. member for Fraser Valley East (Mr. Pringle), who is also a member of the Agriculture Committee, when he noted that farmers think. I wonder when he realized that farmers think. Sure, farmers think. They take plenty of time to think and that is why they are so unhappy about this bill. They have had time to think about it and about what it would mean to them in its present form.

• (3:20 p.m.)

Not only have the farmers been thinking about this, but all of the major farm organizations have been to Ottawa to appear before our standing committee to present farmers' views on this piece of legislation. These organizations included the three prairie wheat pools, the Federation of Agriculture, the National Farmers Union, the United Grain Growers, the Canada Grains Council, Unifarm, and even the minister of agriculture from Manitoba who attended in person. Besides this, each member of the standing committee, made up of 30 members, received over 3,000 letters, each protesting the bill in general and, more specifically, the very area that we are debating in these two motions. Just think, Mr. Speaker, some 90,000 letters were received. Think of the widespread ramifications of these protests as far as this bill is concerned. People have taken the time to write 90,000 letters to Members of Parliament about this bill.

Let me just quote briefly from several of these briefs. I can assure you, Mr. Speaker, that the points they make are very relevant to this debate. I am holding in my hand the brief presented by the Canadian Federation of Agriculture under date of May 7, 1971. On the first page of the brief two very valid points are made, and they are as follows:

1. The vitally necessary payments to be made to prairie producers as so-called "Special Transitional Payments" in the amount of \$100 million. These are urgently required.

I underline that, Mr. Speaker. Indeed the federation itself emphasized it.

2. The long term stabilization and storage policies contained in the Bill. These require much improvement... They should not be, and need not be, conditional.

Let me repeat that, Mr. Speaker.

They should not be, and need not be, conditional.

The brief continues:

We cannot accept the assumption, as a ground rule set by the government, that to get the immediate payment the long term policy must be accepted. It would be highly improper for us to temper our criticism of the long term grains policy in this bill—and we do have criticisms and very serious ones—out of a feeling of fear and urgency respecting possibly delay of these essential