

but they do not have any technical skill or university training. They go into cities and look for jobs. Some of them are unemployed and some are on welfare. It creates a tremendous personal hardship and a tremendous social problem for society as a whole.

We give hundreds of millions of dollars to the oil companies each year in this Parliament through PIP grants, write-offs and all kinds of grants to the friends of the Liberal Party. Instead of doing that, why do we not give some money to the ordinary citizen of the country? Why do we not start priming the pump at the bottom with the ordinary farmer who will spend that money? He will stay on the land, stimulate the economy and create more jobs in Toronto and the rest of the country. That is a very important thing which we can and must do immediately.

I think we should pass the amendment to the Western Grain Stabilization Act as quickly as possible so that payments can be made immediately to western farmers. That should have been done months ago. There is no excuse for that to be left until the fall. If that Act had been passed, a lot more farmers would be in better condition today than those in the constituency of Yorkton-Melville. Those are some of the immediate things we can do, Mr. Speaker.

One more thing we should be doing with regard to the survival of farmers is to give them more long-term security and guarantees about the prices they will receive for their commodities. The time has come in this country for parity pricing for farm products. I have a Private Member's Bill in the House which I would like to have passed as soon as possible. It would provide parity pricing for farm products. In other words, it would guarantee farmers a price for their livestock and grains. Other Canadians often have this type of thing. Members of Parliament have a guaranteed salary. Unionized workers sign contracts. Lawyers and doctors have very powerful associations which work for them. The business community has powerful associations and lobbyists. They have guaranteed prices for their products and work. I make an appeal to the House for parity pricing for farm products so that farmers will have guaranteed prices for the commodities that they produce. That would keep a lot more people on the farms and we would have healthier rural communities.

We certainly support Bill C-23 which is before the House today. I am particularly interested in the part which ends discrimination against farm wives. Mr. Speaker, this is not the only way in which farm wives are discriminated against. Farm wives have had to endure a lot of discriminatory practices in past years. Farm wives do not have pensions and many of the other benefits which urban wives sometimes take for granted. I hope this will be only a beginning toward equality between the sexes on the farm.

I recommend quick passage of this Bill, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to see the end to discrimination and I am pleased to see the amount of cash advance go up. However, after this Bill is passed, let us do something really meaningful to help the farmers stay on the land, such as ending federal gas taxes on farm fuels.

Advance Payments

Hon. Don Mazankowski (Vegreville): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to have the opportunity to participate in this debate on the amendment to the Prairie Grain Advance Payments Act. While I want to speak in absolute support of the Bill, it does afford one the opportunity to speak about the very serious problems which are affecting the agricultural sector, and particularly the grain sector, in western Canada.

At the outset I would like to say that it is a pleasure to see the former Minister of Transport in his place taking up the issues which affect the prairie grain industry and western Canadian farmers. I would like to echo the words of my colleague from Red Deer (Mr. Towers) who alluded to the fact that the former Minister of Transport did make a lot of friends in western Canada, not only in his former capacity as Minister of Trade and Commerce some years ago, but also throughout the course of his initiatives in grappling with the Western Grain Transportation Act. There is one thing that is almost universal as far as western farmers are concerned. That is that they always felt that they had the ear of the Minister and could trust him and that he was very frank and forthright. I think that is an excellent tribute to the Minister. We are very pleased that he is still involved, albeit sometimes on the periphery, but he is still here showing an active interest.

I would also like to acknowledge the fact which has been referred to earlier that this piece of legislation originated with a Conservative administration under the leadership of the former great Prime Minister, the Right Hon. John George Diefenbaker. It is an excellent piece of legislation which has served the test of time and has been upgraded and updated from time to time. That is essentially what we are doing here today.

It is very interesting, Mr. Speaker, that this vehicle, the Prairie Grain Advance Payments Act, is generally used when there is trouble or the imminence of trouble in the prairie farm economy. Since the year 1957, when this Act was first implemented, there has been some \$2.3 billion advanced to the prairie farmers. One could wonder what would have happened if that mechanism had not been available. In going through the statistics that have been provided in the last annual Canadian Wheat Board Report, it is interesting to note the years in which it was used very heavily, the years of difficulty. For example, in the crop year 1968-69, almost \$152 million was advanced. In the year 1969-70, almost \$273 million was advanced. There was then about a ten-year period when the advances were less than \$100 million. In 1978 it went up again to \$150 million. In the last two crop years, 1981-82 and 1982-83, advance payments were up approximately \$334 million and \$309 million respectively. One can almost look at that statistical data and identify the years of difficulty in the prairie grain economy.

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I believe the only criticism we can make about this piece of legislation is the fact that it has taken so long to come forward. Our Party has been advocating amendments to this Bill for quite some time. As a matter of fact, on June 23, 1982 our