

Western Grain Stabilization

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Morin): The hon. member did mention when he was speaking on the bill and when he was speaking on the amendment.

Mr. Hamilton (Qu'Appelle-Moose Mountain): I believe I have made my point. The subject matter of the bill should be referred to the committee, where a timetable can be set out enabling us to meet the farmers and have lots of opportunity to ask them what they think of these various matters—both the principle of the bill and the terms of the bill itself. The minister appears to have no doubt he can convince them that these provisions are clear and understandable. For my part, I do not think the minister is the right person to carry this bill to the farmers.

Those of us who would like to see the principle of stabilization of income put into effect realize that the confidence of farmers is needed before they are willing to put their money into any fund. We all know that the farmer is to put in 2 per cent, and that the government is to put in 4 per cent up to a certain maximum sum. But anyone who understands monetary and fiscal events of this country also knows that the government gets its money back, due to the multiplier effect.

So here is the farmer putting his money in. He does not wish to be overridden by a vast bureaucracy. If we read the speeches made during the course of this debate by members representing farm areas, one theme comes through clearly: they wonder why the bill was not brought in by the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Whelan). After all, the Minister of Agriculture has been saying in a series of speeches over the past year or so that agriculture cannot be broken down; that it must be looked upon as a package. Here in the House is a minister whose primary portfolio has nothing to do with agriculture: he only holds the appointment as minister in charge of the Wheat Board because he comes from the west; westerners would be concerned if the board went out of the hands of a western minister. Here is a minister who is not content with reporting what the Wheat Board has done or omitted to do: he monkeys around with transportation due to the vacuum in the Department of Transportation at the present time; he monkeys around with all things concerning agriculture, such as the incomes of farmers, which are properly a matter for the Department of Agriculture. I would think he should support the suggestion coming from this side of the House that the bill be transferred to the Minister of Agriculture and his department, where it should have been in the first place.

● (1620)

Secondly, by transferring it to the Department of Agriculture we will take away that nagging suspicion that old-time farmers in the west have that the Liberal Party is going back to its old habit of attacking the Canadian Wheat Board. Those of us who know the long history of the Canadian Wheat Board remember the Wheat Board was set up in 1934 and 1935 and was attacked on a broad front between then and 1939. During that time four bills were introduced into this House designed to get rid of the Canadian Wheat Board. What saved the west from the governments' getting rid of the Wheat Board was the war. The government realized it was a device to control prices.

[Mr. Dionne (Northumberland-Miramichi).]

Since the war we have had this whole varied record of the minister interfering with the Wheat Board. Mention has been made of the barley case, the LIFT program, and selling wheat below the cost of production, something that has been mentioned on several occasions previously in the House. Thus, there is this old suspicion in western Canada that you cannot trust the Liberals when it comes to the Canadian Wheat Board. If we could get the Wheat Board to look after the job it is supposed to do, which is to sell grain, instead of trying to run farming operations, as it tried to do partially under the LIFT program and as it is trying to do partially under this program, then the farmers would be a lot happier.

The final reason I would advance for arguing that this bill should go to committee before we decide on the principle is this. One of the major principles in the bill is that it is dealing with an industry. If the incomes of those in this industry in western Canada—the three prairies provinces, parts of B.C. and Ontario—drop, then under the formula those who participate in this plan will receive payment. We have had nearly 35 years experience of large-scale programs. The one example that is most strongly in our minds is PFAA. Under that program there had to be a crop failure in a big area before any farmer was compensated. In an area where some people had good crops but others had crop failures, the latter did not get any money because they were not in an area big enough to get paid. So every so often we had to reform these PFAA areas, or blocks as they called them, and set up smaller blocks. This gave great political power to those who made the decisions to do this. Thus, the farmers are very leery of any kind of government program which, firstly, tries to help improve their income and, secondly, tries to fiddle around by placing them within regional blocks.

Therefore, I ask the farmers these fundamental questions. Would they prefer to have this wide Canadian Wheat Board area as a basis for income adjustment? Would they prefer to have regions or blocks? Or thirdly, would they prefer some basis of individualism whereby they simply pay for individual protection and, based on their own success or failure, they receive payment if their income goes down? This is similar to insuring against loss due to weather, for example, under the crop insurance scheme. You could buy insurance to insure yourself against a drop in income. I suggest that these questions should not be decided by the House but should preferably be decided by the farmers who have to put up the money.

For the reasons I have given, I think the farmers should be asked these questions directly. At this stage I cannot accept the view of the minister. Neither can I accept the briefs of farm groups. I can sense their uncertainty and I am uncertain myself. Before we decide on questions like compulsion or voluntary entry, whole blocks or the individual approach, the question of the bureaucracy involved and the confidence that the farmers have in this minister and Minister of Agriculture, we should let the farmers decide.

I should like to see the bill sent to committee, not only on the question of its principle but on the question of its subject matter. Then we will be able to find out from the farmers who will be putting up money to make the scheme work. We should not ask this House to decide something