

Western Grain Stabilization

on buildings used in farm operations. Whether they be grain bins or whatever, they are necessary to produce grain on the prairies. This legislation also excludes machinery. Why should machinery be excluded? There is nothing which depreciates more rapidly on farms than machinery.

Machinery prices have been skyrocketing in the last number of years. This bill ought to be amended so that it will really stabilize income and make sure farmers do not get behind year after year. There should be a formula to include things like machinery and farm buildings. Interest on debts should be included. Interest accumulates for farmers buying machinery and building materials to put up buildings. The interest on such debts is not included in the bill before us. If this bill is to be one which will in a genuine way stabilize farm income, these things should be included.

Another matter which strikes me as being unfair to small farmers is that the pay-out from the fund in an aggregate manner is determined on the proportion of the farmer's share of contributions he has made to the plan. In other words, if a small farmer has had the misfortune of having low quality crops or poor crops for a series of years, and his payments into the fund have been small, when there is a pay-out from the fund, he receives a small pay-out. The small farmer, or the farmer with the bad quality crop, cannot help what kind of crop he achieves, and if there is a fund which will penalize him for being a small farmer or for having a poor quality crop, that will help push them out of the market. That will not stabilize the western grain industry, and we should be doing that at this time.

These are five or six things which should be rectified in the bill which is before us. There are a number of items which should be mentioned, and which our party and other hon. members will be bringing to the attention of the committee when we get to that stage, but I think, that the most important item we have to resolve at second reading today is that if this bill is to be effective, it must be discussed across this country by farmers at open meetings of the agriculture committee. There has to be input from the farmers, be it from the farmers' union, the wheat pool, the federation of agriculture or any other group.

This is a complicated bill. One or two lawyers in the House have said that it is one of the most complicated bills. In many ways it is similar to the income tax bill we debated a few months ago. I think even the hon. member for Saskatoon-Biggar (Mr. Hnatyshyn) would say that in certain respects the bill is rather complicated. We do not know what the minister means in some of the clauses of this bill. These clauses have to be clarified.

Farmers have to know what this bill will cost, what it will be giving to them in terms of pay-outs and benefits, and this can only be achieved through public hearings. Surely to goodness, that is democracy. We in this House when we draft legislation are delegates of the people, but before we pass any bills into law which fundamentally affect the livelihood of people, the least we can do is have public hearings extensively where all affected people will have a chance to appear with briefs, if they so wish, to suggest amendments and to recommend to us whether to support the bill in its present form or in an amended form.

[Mr. Nystrom.]

Mr. Joe Clark (Rocky Mountain): Mr. Speaker, it is a great privilege for me to have the opportunity to participate in this debate, and particularly to follow the hon. member for Yorkton-Melville (Mr. Nystrom). I will take this opportunity to welcome him back to the House of Commons after his road show.

An hon. Member: Was he sick?

Mr. Clark (Rocky Mountain): He always makes an energetic contribution, which he did on the road show when he was travelling across the country. I understand that he was recently in my own province and had the opportunity of meeting the one supporter of his party who lives there. I want to congratulate him on that, and welcome him back.

I am also pleased to speak in the presence of the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Whelan). I want to congratulate him on overcoming what was obviously the design of his colleague, the Minister of Justice (Mr. Lang), responsible for everything under the sun, in arranging for this debate to be held tonight, the same night the Minister of Agriculture was to appear as a witness to discuss one of the few pieces of agricultural legislation which still comes under his jurisdiction. I am pleased that the minister was able to have that standing committee cancelled and that he is able to be here tonight. I imagine this is the closest the Minister of Agriculture will come to Bill C-41, which should have appeared under his sponsorship.

We are all very pleased that this bill is finally back in the House for second reading and that we have an opportunity to discuss a measure which has been of great concern, to western Canadians in particular, for nearly five years since the predecessor to this bill first appeared in 1970. It casts a peculiar light on the priorities of the government when one remembers that this has been an urgent bill ever since December when it was first introduced by the Minister of Justice, responsible for everything under the sun. At that time he said it was a priority matter, yet it has been a priority now for almost five months. Several other bills which are clearly not of the same importance to western Canada, or to the country, have taken precedence over it, but we are pleased that it has now found its way on to the agenda of parliament to be considered at second reading.

I must support an observation made at the beginning of the remarks of the hon. member for Yorkton-Melville when he suggested that the timing of consideration of this bill is unfortunate from the point of view of many of the farmers most directly concerned. It would have been preferable to have had this bill for second reading at the time when the minister said it was a priority, and to have had the opportunity to have the standing committee travel through the country to hold public hearings. This would have encouraged a contribution from the people most directly concerned at a time when they were relatively free to express their concern and not preoccupied with seeding or other problems of the busy season.

● (2020)

I want to return to the procedural question of public meetings of the standing committee, Mr. Speaker. We on this side of the House believe that it is absolutely essential