

Prairie Farm Assistance

is less than 135 townships or fifteen municipalities, the province should assume some responsibility in connection with the care of those who happen to have crops of under five bushels to the acre in that limited number of townships within the province.

Then the other section of the bill, section 3, provides for a form of assistance which may come in any year when the price is below 80 cents a bushel. That assistance takes the form of an acreage payment, and that payment will be paid on the basis of \$1 an acre for areas which have a crop from 9 to 12 bushels inclusive, \$1.50 an acre for areas having a crop of 5 to 8 bushels inclusive, and \$2 an acre for areas having a crop of from nothing to 4 bushels an acre, on half the cropped acreage. This applies whether the acreage is in wheat or any other crops. In other words, we are not insisting upon farmers growing wheat in order to get assistance when they require that assistance, as we did when we paid the 80 cent price, which involved a bonus of 15 to 20 cents a bushel, or when we paid the bonus in 1931 and 1932. We are saying that farmers can go on and farm in the normal way and have their payments made upon an acreage basis.

I think that is all that is necessary to say in moving the second reading of the bill.

Hon. R. J. MANION (Leader of the Opposition): I shall not talk at any great length this evening; indeed there is not much more than half an hour left before closing time. Without in any way wishing to criticize the minister, I should like to put it on record that he took nearly two hours in expounding these bills, so that some time when the government is inclined to chide the opposition for holding up business I should like them to recall that.

Mr. GARDINER: An hour and a half to be exact.

Mr. MANION: An hour and a half this evening, but the minister spoke this afternoon as well. However, I have no criticism of that, because the minister's speech was interesting.

I hesitate to take much part in a discussion of this kind because it is a subject with which only hon. members from the prairie provinces, and more particularly those who, like the minister, the hon. member for Qu'Appelle and others, have been farmers themselves for many years, can talk with any real degree of authority. At the same time I grew up and lived for many years at the head of the lakes, at Fort William, which was for many years the only spout through which the western grain poured. It now shares that business

[Mr. Gardiner.]

with Vancouver. Therefore I have been familiar in a general way with the wheat traffic and even wheat growing for many years.

The wheat business is a complicated matter, and is made still more so at the present time because of the different bills the minister is bringing in—three or four different bills; and still more because of the changes of policy which have been made by the minister himself and by the government in dealing with the emergency. About the middle of February the minister spoke of the legislation proposed to be brought in by the government, and while he did not say it definitely I gathered from his remarks, as did others also, that there was to be no wheat board, no fixed price, that the wheat was to be handled not by the government but in the ordinary course of futures. In addition to that, he mentioned an acreage bonus, although in a somewhat different form from that proposed to-night. Then, about two months later I think, there was a change made by which the government came back to the wheat board and a 60-cent initial price and an acreage bonus. In the last few days there has been still another change, a third policy, in which both bills have been altered considerably and the initial price has been raised to 70 cents. I say that merely to indicate why the question is even more complicated at the present time, particularly to one like myself who is not so familiar with the question as the minister or other hon. members from the prairies.

I realize the importance of the wheat industry, the grain growing industry, to the whole of Canada. I realize the importance of agriculture in general, and always have. It has always appeared to me that agriculture is the basic industry of national progress in any country, and certainly in such a country as Canada. It is, I believe, the most important industry in our country. It has been the foundation of civilization throughout the ages. I believe that without a proper basis of agricultural industry a country is not properly rounded out. With all due respect to those who favour the free trade policy, I believe that the great mistake England made in 1846 was in introducing free trade and so damaging irreparably her agricultural industry; whereas countries like France, Germany and others in Europe have always maintained almost sufficient agriculture to supply their necessary food.

While all farming is important, wheat growing is the largest individual item. And while wheat growing is carried on most extensively in the prairie provinces, I deplore very much anything in the way of dividing this country