

Normally in western Canada where there is a crop disaster of quite a large proportion it covers a large area and involves a number of farmers. In eastern Canada it can be in one particular crop, and wipe out that crop and have not much effect on other areas. It has been brought home to me very forcibly that crop insurance still leaves a great deal to be desired.

About five years ago in Ontario there was a disaster caused by weather conditions, and the Ontario government lent sums of \$5,000 or \$10,000 to replace crops so that farmers could stay in business. This year, with the cost of farm inputs being high, with a poor crop in Northern Ontario last year, the minister of agriculture in Ontario has put all those bills into collection, and he is using a collection agency to collect from the farmers. Crop insurance is still necessary for protection from disaster. I sincerely hope that we will continue to work toward providing a type of universal coverage which will cover not only crop economy but which will cover mixed economies.

I hope the minister will give serious consideration to sending this to committee. I agree that he has to be sympathetic with his colleagues, no matter how nutty they become. I think that he has to have some solidarity, but he really has an obligation to farmers as well. He should allow us to call witnesses. He should allow us to arrive, as representatives of farmers, at the best way of disposing of this fund.

I think he also has an obligation, in winding up the Prairie Farm Assistance Act, to provide for the staff being displaced. It is not as though this happened yesterday. I am looking at a press release dated July 16, 1971, when the then minister of agriculture, Mr. Bud Olson, announced the winding up of the PFAA, and he expected that to take place in May of the following year. We have been doing it for some time, and it seems to me that farmers would be better served if consideration were given to the best method of handling it, though not necessarily the most politically expedient for the cabinet minister who comes from that area.

Mr. J. H. Horner (Crowfoot): Madam Speaker, I realize that if the minister spoke now, the debate would close. I am very disappointed that some of the other members from Saskatchewan did not rise in their place and make an honest attempt to set aside the fears and the accusations which were expressed so vividly by the hon. member for Qu'Appelle-Moose Mountain (Mr. Hamilton), the hon. member for Red Deer (Mr. Towers), and others here this afternoon, with regard to an act which has served western Canada and the prairies rather well for some 34 years. I would hate to think that the Act is now being swept under the rug in a cloud of suspicion that the books are not accurately audited, and that the RCMP is carrying out an investigation, as we were told this afternoon.

If we pass this bill now there is reason to believe that, for some reason or another, the RCMP will not become awfully busy, and that the investigation they had attempted to start will lie on the shelf somewhere and never be completed. One of the basic concepts of democracy is that the government of the day shall be accountable to the elected representatives of the people. We have seen no accounting at all here today.

Prairie Farm Assistance Act

The RCMP is carrying on an investigation. The Auditor General has photographed all the books of the PFAA. Now the government wants to hurry and repeal the act so that the whole examination by the Auditor General's department can be forgotten, and so that the investigation by the RCMP can be forgotten.

The hon. member for Assiniboia (Mr. Goodale), who was in the House this afternoon, all of a sudden disappeared. Apparently the speech writers the Liberal party hire could not prepare a speech in time for him to speak this afternoon. That may be one excuse he will give to his constituents. I do not know. Where is the hon. member for Battleford-Kindersley (Mr. McIsaac)? Why is he not speaking in this debate and strongly defending the government's purpose for repealing this piece of legislation? The backbone of democracy must be that the executive is accountable to parliament. We have seen no accounting here today. No one has even attempted to account.

The Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Whelan) is an innocent bystander with regard to the operations of the PFAA. All of the accusations made this afternoon by speakers from the NDP and from the Conservative party have been directed at the Minister of Justice (Mr. Lang), his manipulations and his delicate hand in the manoeuvring of the operations of the PFAA inspectors.

The hon. member for Assiniboia, who is a former executive assistant to the Minister of Justice, fled from the House when he saw that this was going to be a prolonged debate, when he discovered that he might be asked to do some accounting, and to rise in his place and make an attempt to defend the Minister of Justice.

Why do I say that someone has had his delicate hand in the operations of the PFAA? It has been made clear that the auditor has photographed all the books of the PFAA and that the RCMP is carrying out an investigation. There is, supposedly, \$9 million in the fund. Bill C-30 does not mention any amount of money. Clause 1.(2) says:

● (1750)

All moneys remaining in the Prairie Farm Emergency Fund immediately prior to the repeal of the Prairie Farm Assistance Act . . .

That does not say any specific amount. I suppose if we were following that we should have repealed the bill some years ago when there would have been more money than there is today. There would have been more after the 1974 election if the accusations made this afternoon are correct that some of the casual help spent as much as \$1,400 in two weeks just prior to that election. At that time the director of the PFAA told them they were not to do work in that area, but they got authority from somebody else to do the work and spent the money.

It has been long established that the PFAA has been used as a political tool, a political machine. The name of Jimmy Gardiner has been mentioned this afternoon. He set up the PFAA to work just that way and do his bidding, whether that implied political doings or otherwise. Why do I say "political doing or otherwise", Madam Speaker? A lot of evidence has been put on the record this afternoon to the effect that most of the supervisors appointed were former candidates of the Liberal Party.