

Prairie Grain Stabilization Act

I accept the minister's sincerity in this regard. I believe him when he says that the viability of family farms in Canada is important to the entire national interest. We take him at his word when he says that. Yet, Mr. Speaker, he continues to perpetuate policies that will speed up, not slow down, those practices which have been adopted with respect to agriculture in Canada since 1945. We have lost over 300,000 family farm units in this country. It is not surprising, perhaps, that most if not all of our quarter-section farms have gone and that most half-section farms have disappeared from the Prairies. But when farmers farming $1\frac{1}{2}$ sections, 2 sections or $2\frac{1}{2}$ sections have lost money, as they have in my riding, we know that something must be wrong. When you find that net farm income has fallen by \$516 million since June, 1968, or approximately since this government took office, you know that something must be fundamentally wrong.

We can find \$120 million for uranium. I am not against that sort of payment. It has saved the life of several communities in Canada and the payment has enabled us to stockpile uranium. But what does the minister propose? He proposes that we abandon the Temporary Wheat Reserves Act. He suggests that the government should not pay its share of the cost of keeping in this country an inventory of wheat and other grains. Mr. Speaker, he can threaten us with his press release. Yesterday it was being handed out, I gather, while he was making his speech in the House. He can threaten us that way if he likes. If he likes, he can act like the typical ward-heeler of the Prairies who went out with the dinosaurs in the 1920s or 1930s. Oh, yes, he can threaten us if he likes. While his press release was appearing in the nation's newspapers or was being carried on the news wires, the minister was making his speech on this bill and telling us we were filibustering.

An hon. Member: Shame.

Mr. Benjamin: The way the minister was talking, it had to sound like a filibuster in the sense that this government is determined to get out of supporting agriculture. The task force report on agriculture outlined that policy for the government. It is not unexpected that the government would follow the recommendations of the task force.

● (9:30 p.m.)

The minister says we are filibustering for no apparent reason. I wish he would return to his ivory tower law faculty of the University of Saskatoon. If he would return now, he would do both the law faculty in Saskatoon and all the farmers in Canada a favour. When the minister says we are filibustering for no apparent reason, and net farm income has dropped by \$516 million since he joined the cabinet, he is talking through his hat. The minister suggests we are working against the interest of grain growers in the three prairie provinces and trying to make political hay. If fighting a fight that has been going on here since the end of World War II for grain growers in western Canada is making political hay,

[Mr. Benjamin.]

I plead guilty. I hope the minister will visit my constituency and butt into grain instead of post offices. I would appreciate it. I will never write a letter to anyone in his constituency urging that a post office be closed. I would like the minister to visit my constituency and talk about grain.

I would like the minister to explain to the farmers in my constituency, let alone in the three prairie provinces, where this \$100 million will come from. I have some opinions. I might be wrong, and I am sure the minister will correct me when he closes the debate, but when the minister abolishes the Temporary Wheat Reserves Act, albeit we can store uranium for five years at a cost of \$120 million, the government will save \$40 million a year. That is almost half of \$100 million. When you add to that the amount the government will not have to pay out for the grain pools at the start of the next crop year in the form of losses, it can be seen that the government will more than recover the \$100 million.

As another member pointed out during the debate on the pay increase for Members of Parliament, there were 11 people sitting in the press gallery. When talking about wheat, there are only a couple up there. I hope they are farmers. In any event, for the benefit of those Canadians who do not live in the three prairie provinces I hope they will point that this program will not cost the government or our taxpayers anything. This \$100 million is not a gift from the taxpayers.

I now wish to deal with the transitional payment. It is called a transitional payment because the minister has not been able to persuade his colleagues or to set up the machinery to establish the stabilization fund for the current crop year. That is the main reason it is called transitional. The minister is a very nice man. He is very smart; but when it comes to wheat he is incompetent. We are going to say so all over western Canada. The minister can try political blackmail if he wishes. He can object to a filibuster on this bill while he is still making his speech, but that is not going to stop us.

At the beginning of my speech I spoke of a national tragedy and a drop in net farm income of \$516 million. The minister is going to pay out \$100 million. This means he will still owe us \$416 million. If the minister wants to add that into his transitional payments, this bill will go through so fast he will not have time to speak to close the debate. With regard to the stabilization fund, if one were to assume \$1 billion worth of sales of the six grains at 4 per cent that the government is going to contribute to the stabilization fund, that is barely equal to what the government will save by cancelling the Temporary Wheat Reserves Act. Each year, starting with the next crop year, the government will pay no more into a stabilization fund than it has done under the Temporary Wheat Reserves Act. If you add to that the deficit, which I understand is \$51 million on the 1968-69 pool account, there is the whole \$100 million.

It has been said several times in this debate, and it will be said several more times, that all the minister is doing is stabilizing a grains income that for the past several years has been below what the grain growers needed to