

*Prairie Farm Assistance Act*

always very sympathetic to this type of legislation or any suggestion for amendments to improve it for the benefit of the farmer. I think we have to go back for a few moments and analyse why this legislation was introduced by the Liberals in 1939. At that time western Canada had successive crop failures. Drought had crippled the farmers economically. This was part of the legislation introduced at that time, along with other legislation on the statute books, by both Liberal and Conservative governments. We want to be fair in that regard.

However, I believe we should not lose track of the fact this legislation was not introduced as crop insurance but was more of a relief measure to combat the drought that had hit the western Canadian farmer. I do not want to get into an argument with my good friend from Assiniboia this afternoon, but he talks about the workers under prairie farm assistance doing organizational work or whatever he wishes to call it. I am sure he must have had a nightmare, and when he had that nightmare he must have been looking at the old files of Jimmy Gardiner. There is a member of parliament sitting in this house who has told me on several occasions that he was employed on prairie farm assistance work under Mr. Gardiner. He was told, "When you are not working on prairie farm assistance you are to be organizing for the Liberal party". No doubt that is the file the hon. member for Assiniboia got into. Of course, he never could have looked in that file if he had not moved from this corner to where he is sitting now.

I do not believe there is a statute on the statute books that gives more headaches to the administrators and to the members of parliament than this one, because the act is based on the eligibility of certain blocks and certain acreage returns. This kind of a law makes bad exceptions from time to time. Western members of parliament, and I am sure those around me will agree with me, receive letters from our constituents saying: Mr. Jones and Mr. Black received payments and we have not received any, even though we appear to be in the block. Of course, this is the kind of legislation with which we are dealing, and it does make bad exceptions from time to time. As a member of parliament from Alberta, I want to deal with some of the problems we face before I deal with the resolution itself.

As hon. members know, there is a strip of land along the foothills which is known as the hail belt of western Canada. Hail is not like drought because it follows narrow strips. This act is based on 12 section blocks

and when you have a hailstorm this act makes bad exceptions. There may be two or three farmers hailed out in one area, but of course if they are not in the eligible block then they do not comply with the law and receive no payments under prairie farm assistance. I think when we are amending the act, I am going to have something to say about that. There may be some suggestion made by the hon. member for Assiniboia which should be included in the act. However, I am going to suggest we make an exception for hail.

I repeat, when you have a dry area on the prairies, you generally have a large number of farms in that area that have been dried out and the yield is below the eight bushels so you can get within these blocks and comply with the law. However, as I say, when you have a hailstorm there may be only one, two or three farms that are damaged. These farmers cannot comply with the law. Their financial problem is just as tough as it would be if they had suffered from drought. You can take a trip this afternoon from Calgary to Drumheller and you will pass through one of the finest farm districts in Alberta. However, one of the worst hailstorms went through that area this year and I doubt if this strip of land will be able to comply with the act. This is something that should be considered in the future when we get into the problem of amending this act.

**Mr. Argue:** A very good suggestion.

**Mr. Woolliams:** I am glad to hear my good friend the hon. member for Assiniboia agrees with me. This is the first time he has agreed with me since the day we graduated from the University of Saskatchewan. I think perhaps the basis for qualifying under this act should be the individual farm itself. Hail does not discriminate against the efficient or inefficient farmer. I am sure there are farm members who would agree with me that sometimes poor crops are due to inefficient operators, but when it comes to a hailstorm the hail does not discriminate between the efficient or inefficient operator. These people have always been left on the outside.

This brings me to a significant point so far as Alberta is concerned. Except for the hail damage, these people to whom I referred very seldom qualify under the act. There is a large group of farms along the foothills surrounding Calgary and Edmonton that very seldom have crop failures as the result of drought. However, over the years these farmers have been contributing through this 1 per cent levy on all grains that are delivered. They have contributed this 1 per cent, and yet they have received no benefit under the act. This is the first point I want to discuss when we consider increasing the levy from 1 per