

Grain—Deficiency Payments

expected the government to act, and farmers have had a good deal of faith that the government would act.

The events of March 31 demonstrated to every person on the prairies, no matter what political party he might have voted for on election day, that the people of the prairies had displayed great confidence in the present Prime Minister (Mr. Diefenbaker) and in the stated policies of the Conservative party. I know that a great number of them were most unhappy on April 1 and had the feeling that they had gone too far and that it was not in the best interests of parliamentary government that in the three prairie provinces which return 48 members, 47 should be members of one political party. But that action was taken and I do not think that in general the public were sorry they had supported the government.

But now they are beginning to question the government as to what its agricultural policies are going to be, and they are asking this question day after day, over and over again: when is the government going to announce its policy on deficiency payments?

The western wheat pool organizations, which in the past have always been considered cautious and careful organizations, organizations which adopt and initiate policies only after a great deal of the most careful consideration, have now for more than two years been asking for deficiency payments. Before the final payment was announced on the 1956-57 wheat crop the prairie wheat pool organizations had been asking for deficiency payments on wheat for 1955-56 of 22 cents a bushel; for 1956-57 of 30 cents a bushel; for oats, 1955-56, four cents a bushel; 1956-57, 15 cents a bushel; for barley, 1955-56, 14 cents a bushel; 1956-57, 22 cents a bushel; and they estimated that the total amount of money that would be involved on the basis of these requests would be in excess of \$220 million.

That was before the final payment was announced on the 1956-57 wheat crop. The farmers were disappointed. The wheat pool organizations, through their spokesmen, said they were shocked at the very low final payment averaging approximately six cents a bushel and because the final payment was amended to six cents a bushel they altered their request for a deficiency payment and increased it from 30 cents a bushel to 36 cents a bushel. I understand, from reading the press, that at the last annual meeting of the Saskatchewan wheat pool a resolution was passed instructing the incoming board of directors to wait upon the government to present their request for deficiency payments and by the time of the next annual meeting, which is in November, this year, to have

[Mr. Argue.]

received a satisfactory answer from the federal government or in the meantime to have organized to be sent to Ottawa a mass delegation to wait upon the government to impress upon it the producers' views.

The government has made no announcement. The directors of that organization are under these definite instructions from their annual convention. That is why they are so anxious that the government delay no further this very important announcement. This request is supported not only by the wheat pool organizations but by the farm union organizations and at various conferences throughout western Canada it has been endorsed by most organizations with a mass membership. It has been supported by rural municipal associations, urban municipal associations, retail merchants' associations and by some church organizations and teachers' federations in their annual conferences.

This is a request that is not confined to the spokesmen in a given political party nor is it confined to spokesmen in a given organization. This is a request that is supported by the people of the three prairie provinces almost unanimously. I confidently hope and expect that it is supported by the 47 Conservative members in this house from the prairie provinces. I would be highly surprised if it were not. There was such an indication during this session at the time I asked the Minister of Trade and Commerce (Mr. Churchill) whether or not the government was giving consideration to this question. The minister replied that the 47 Conservative members to whom I have referred were as anxious as I was to have action on the matter and had spoken to him about it. I hope they have continued expressing themselves to the minister in this regard. I also hope that sometime this evening before the main motion is put to the house we will have an expression from hon. members from the various provinces that are mainly affected by this question because I expect that the people back home, for that matter all the people on the prairies, will be anxious to hear from them as representatives of the people in the three prairie provinces.

Although the Liberal party is not represented in the house through members from the three prairie provinces I would also hope there would be some indication of the attitude of the official opposition with respect to this question. We all know from practical experience that when the government presents any program, and particularly a new one, it is anxious to know the stand of the opposition parties in this house. If the proposition put to the house by the government is unanimously supported then there is