

*Western Grain Stabilization*

virtue of the number of seats it holds in agricultural areas—this should be evident even to the hon. member for Assiniboia—has more agricultural support than the opposition. Therefore, there is a very important element of confidence in the opposition in respect of agriculture. This fact has been evident over a great many years.

So far as I am concerned, the field of agriculture should not be exploited as a political game. However, it should be discussed and from that discussion should evolve programs which can perhaps establish a healthy and viable agricultural industry in this country. I submit that this bill is but another piece of evidence of the lack of understanding by the government of a multitude of aspects of agriculture, and a reflection of agricultural input by an urban-oriented group of people who do not have the understanding of agriculture which is necessary to create policies which would be satisfactory and successful.

I find it very difficult on occasion to agree with the hon. member for Timiskaming (Mr. Peters), but I would have to say that in his remarks last night he illustrated beyond any question the idiocy of the formula which is to be the base upon which payments shall be made to those who will benefit under this legislation. Certainly, I think anybody who is familiar with agriculture would be quite capable of coming up with a simple formula based on the earnings of the farmer rather than based upon all the indices which have been dreamed up by somebody far, far away so far as his knowledge of agriculture is concerned.

Basically, everything that has been proposed from this side of the House has been completely rejected, out of hand, as being unrealistic. I wish to give an example of one error of the bill in specifying the expenses a farmer may have as part of his cost of production. There are two very important items deleted; I submit, perhaps by intent. The first is the rental cost, of which there is no mention. The second is the interest cost of the farmer who does not at this moment in time, or will at the moment in time of his application for assistance, have his farm paid for. The bill is designed to help the established, self-financed individual and it is prejudicial to individuals who do not have this healthy financial position. It would be very simple indeed, as a simplistic interpretation of the bill, to say that costs which will be taken into consideration in the filing of an income tax return shall be costs contributing to the cost of producing grain. That would cover the field. Often when we just listen, we delete, by oversight, some of the obvious things which are part of the cost of farming.

● (1250)

I submit this bill looks like the product of somebody who has dwelled too long in the marble halls of the autocratic structure of a government which has perhaps become a little bit egotistical in respect of its knowledge of agriculture and agricultural needs. This does not mean, Madam Speaker, that I am in any way opposing the principle of supporting the income of every farmer in Canada who has a reasonably sized unit. Such person is entitled to a good income, as is any other member of our society. This is something that was recognized until this government came to power some ten years ago. Since then we have been moving farther and farther away from the realities of a healthy agricultural industry.

[Mr. McCain.]

This bill is a further example of the fragmentation of the government's approach to agriculture. This government has the audacity to say to farmers in western Canada that the Minister of Agriculture is incapable of administering their affairs. The government says "We shall pick at random somebody whom we think is more capable. We do not trust the Minister of Agriculture, so we will not put this stabilization program in his hands but will reserve the right to name someone else". This is an insult to the Minister of Agriculture and to agriculture itself. Once again we are to have an interdepartmental committee. I suppose that means it will comprise of somebody from income tax, somebody from statistics, somebody from transport, but no one agriculturally orientated and capable of understanding the problems of agriculture. The bill does not spell out who shall be on the committee, nor does past performance indicate that this government will put agriculturalists in charge of it.

In several places the bill leads me to believe that full consideration has not been given to those who may not be eligible to participate in this plan. For instance, if the minister decrees that a farmer is not eligible, and at a later date that farmer is reinstated as a result of an appeal to the Federal court, he may find himself in the second-rate position of an individual who has chosen, for the first time, to participate. I believe such person would be covered by clause 5 (2) of the bill, but his participation in the plan would be delayed and limited. This is not in line with the ordinary principles of justice which any citizen of this country has a right to expect.

The bill also overlooks regional requirements. Grain growing areas may be hit by strikes, by transportation problems, and so on; but there is nothing in the bill to cover such contingencies. Let us suppose that because of transportation problems it was impossible to move western wheat to Vancouver and the eastern outlets were already loaded to capacity. What would happen to the grain growing areas which might not receive any income because the grain could not be moved? There is in this bill no provision for relief to such an area.

The Minister of Agriculture has made derogatory remarks about Canadian marketing in general and has said some unkind things about potato marketing in New Brunswick in particular and the Atlantic area. I think this is another area in which the marketing of the crop will be a very important factor as to whether the producer of the grains referred to in the bill may or may not need help. One might wonder if this plan is intended to replace crop insurance. There does not seem to be any relationship between an individual who receives compensation through crop insurance and an individual who may have suffered a couple of years of hail damage and who applies for help under this plan. If I am wrong, I stand to be corrected. I see the minister responsible for the Wheat Board (Mr. Lang) shaking his head. A declining payment is available under crop insurance; it does not remain static. But a farmer whose crop is hit by hail or flood for two or three years in a row may find he is not eligible for stabilization payments.

May I call it one o'clock, Madam Speaker?