

Withholding of Grain Payments

if the people of the prairie provinces believe him, then it is passing strange how they conducted themselves in Alberta and Saskatchewan on a couple of dates in June and August. I say this was an insult to the intelligence of the prairie farmers because they feel the same way we do, and we will not be blackmailed or bullied into passing legislation that the minister claims is beneficial.

If one of my duties as a Member of Parliament is to cave in because the fighting is going to be tough, then the best thing the voters can do in my constituency is defeat me the next time around. I will take my chances on that score, and I am sure the minister will, too. He will have quite a job.

• (5.30 p.m.)

An hon. Member: He is going to the Senate.

Mr. Benjamin: We shall miss him in the next Parliament. I should certainly like to see his figures. The minister claims that his package will provide more money than was provided under previous programs. I think the National Farmers Union says something about this in language that is polite for that organization. They allege that Bill C-244 as presently constituted is inadequate in the following respects, as set out on page 12 of their brief:

Bill C-244 is a vehicle enabling the federal government to abrogate a number of federal policies related to the expenditure of public funds for the support of agriculture without reciprocating its commitments to grain stabilization on a comparable basis.

The brief continues and the following reasons are given for that position:

(i) Ending its commitment to guarantee initial prices to producers for wheat, oats and barley . . . In 1968-69 this guarantee for wheat resulted in payment by the government of \$17,675,888 to the Canadian Wheat Board.

That was a payment of almost \$18 million. Keep that in mind, Mr. Speaker. Another reason relates to ending the support of storage payments under the Temporary Wheat Reserves Act for wheat in commercial storage over 178 million bushels at the end of the crop year. That payment has averaged over \$40 million a year, bringing the total to almost \$59 million that the government will not need to pay. The brief continues:

(iii) Repealing the Prairie Farm Assistance Act—

That will do away with \$6 million that has been paid out annually from the federal treasury, bringing the total to about \$65 million. The brief also speaks of—

—the discontinuance of the policy requiring millers to purchase wheat entering domestic human consumption at the basic rate of \$1.95½ per bushel.

This will result in an annual loss of between \$12 million and \$15 million to wheat producers at present price levels. All this adds up—I think my arithmetic is reasonably correct—to approximating \$75 million that the government will not pay or require to be paid. Under this legislation the government will be committed to an annual amount of approximately \$40 million. This legislation, Mr. Speaker, is introduced purely and simply, not for the purpose of introducing meaningful programs for the western grains industry but in order to save the federal treasury between \$35 million and \$40 million.

Some hon. Members: Shame!

Mr. Benjamin: I believe the minister is sincere. He made some valiant efforts with his cabinet colleagues to get more for the farmers than is contained in the legislation, and they turned him down. I believe he fought a hard battle with them last February or March for a two-price system, and they turned him down. I appeal to him to take another run at his cabinet colleagues and try to obtain, again, a two-price system. More important than that, I ask him to do something meaningful with regard to the Temporary Wheat Reserves Act.

The minister was perfectly right when he said that all farm organizations have spoken about the inadequacies of the Temporary Wheat Reserves Act. There has never been any argument about that. The minister has chosen to use the act as a façade behind which he can hide, because he needs an excuse for repealing it. There are some good points about the Temporary Wheat Reserves Act. It has relieved farmers over 14 years of the burden of several hundred million dollars in storage costs. The money has been paid to the Wheat Board by the federal government. The act established a precedent, if not a principle. I think it established a principle. It established the beginning of a good principle, that the nation as a whole, through the federal government, would participate in sharing the costs of grain storage.

As I said in an earlier debate, we could find \$120 million to pay for the storage of uranium. I did not object to that. That payment will protect thousands of jobs and help some communities which would otherwise die. We can find that amount of money for the storage of uranium, but it seems that we cannot find about one-third of that amount to share in the cost of storing grain, a commodity which I submit is much more useful and necessary than uranium.

Mr. Gilbert: Right.

Mr. Benjamin: Those are some of the good aspects of the Temporary Wheat Reserves Act. The main thing is that that act has set a precedent. It has begun a good principle, namely, that the nation as a whole shall assume some financial responsibility for the cost of grain storage. What about aspects of the Temporary Wheat Reserves Act that are not so good? It applied only to wheat, as the minister said. It is backward legislation. Since it is Liberal legislation dating from about 1956, I believe, one would expect it to be a bit backward. After 14 years the Liberals do not know how to turn it around and make it a forward-looking piece of legislation. They want to repeal the whole thing. The minister is aware of the good aspects of the Temporary Wheat Reserves Act, and the bad, and his solution is to throw the whole act out or, as the old saying goes, to throw the baby out with the bath water.

I suggest that the minister consider the policy of the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool regarding grain storage and listen to what has been said time and again by farm organizations and co-operative elevator companies. These organizations ask him to do something positive with regard to the Temporary Wheat Reserves Act. I propose that he bring in new clauses to Bill C-244 that will make up what could be known as the Canada grain storage act and would include the six grains mentioned in Bill C-244. I suggest, Mr. Speaker, that the government should reverse the procedure that has been followed under the Tempo-