

tive Party and the NDP. There was a crisis in western Canada at that time, and something had to be done.

With that as a background, we went out to western Canada. The committee was split into pairs and I travelled with the hon. member for Kent-Essex (Mr. Danforth). We visited a number of grain farms in western Canada, and I must say that anyone who was there must have experienced a feeling of compassion.

Mr. Horner (Crowfoot): Have you heard the story about the gophers?

Mr. Whicher: Mr. Speaker, I listened to the hon. member for Crowfoot (Mr. Horner) most of the afternoon. He asked for some advice. Now he is not listening but is giving advice. If he will just keep quiet, as I did for him this afternoon, we will get along very well. One of the few faults of that hon. member becomes apparent whenever he opens his mouth. For a few minutes tonight I hope the hon. member will be quiet, as I was this afternoon.

In 1969 the grain farmers in western Canada were experiencing a crisis. On our visit we found wheat in the barns, in the garages, in the sheds and on many farms on the ground. We found grain lying on the ground, contained by plywood and covered by tarpaulins. As most of us know, one billion bushels of wheat was on hand in western Canada at that time. People from the cities, be it Ottawa, Toronto, Montreal or wherever, cannot imagine what a billion bushels of wheat looks like. They cannot really appreciate the critical situation in western Canada at that time.

Let me read a sentence from the supplementary report of the Canadian Wheat Board dated August 31, 1971:

Canada's carryover as at July 31, 1970 also reached a new record of 1,009 million bushels, which was 157 million bushels greater than the previous year's record, 852 million bushels.

I am sure people who live in the cities cannot realize what a billion of bushels of grain means to western agriculture, particularly when nothing can be done about it. Quite rightly, in my opinion, the farmers looked to the government and to the Canadian Wheat Board to do something to sell that wheat somewhere. I remember attending a meeting with the hon. member for Kent-Essex and the minister responsible for the Wheat Board, at Humboldt, Saskatchewan. I remember being somewhat critical, thinking to myself that the government should get out into the markets all over the world and sell this wheat in order to help these people who desperately needed help.

During our visit we talked to members of Chambers of Commerce of various towns, village and cities in western Canada. They pleaded with us to go back to Ottawa and tell the government it must do something because trade was slowing down and the farmers were going to lose their farms. The banks moved in and unfortunately many farmers did lose their land. This was a crisis if ever I saw one.

My friends have the right to criticize today, but I suggest they cannot criticize the fact the government has too much grain on hand. Their main criticism lies in the fact that the government did too good a job of disposing of the surplus wheat. Hon. members say this grain was disposed of at fire-sale prices and they blame the minister responsible for the Wheat Board. I am satisfied that if the

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minister could have sold the wheat at higher prices but did not, he would deserve that criticism.

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From what I have read, and so far as I can see, there is no justification whatever for saying that the farmers were sold down the river, or that grain grown in Canada was sold across the world at fire-sale prices. I will tell you, Mr. Speaker, when farmers did sell at fire-sale prices, and that is when they were selling from farmer to farmer in western Canada. This was because they did not have enough money to put clothing on their children's backs and did not have enough money to buy proper food for their children. So they sold three bushels of barley for \$1 in western Canada. That was a fire-sale price.

Mr. Horner (Crowfoot): Where and when?

Mr. Whicher: That wheat was not sold by the minister responsible for the Wheat Board but by the farmers themselves, and those are prices that western Canada can keep. Judy LaMarsh once described the hon. member for Crowfoot as one of those noisy holler boys, and he is certainly exemplifying that description tonight.

Because of the fact that Canada had to meet the world market price, we had to sell wheat cheaply. Was wheat sold below production cost?

Some hon. Members: Yes.

Mr. Whicher: To be fair, I do not know whether it was or was not, but possibly it was sold below production cost. If that was the case, it was because the farmers of western Canada demanded that the government sell it. It was because the Tories across the way demanded that it be sold, and even I as a Liberal demanded it be sold. Because when you are almost starving to death, some money is a whole lot better than none at all.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Whicher: I heard the speech of the hon. member for Crowfoot this afternoon. I always listen to him most attentively, even though sometimes he is most boring. In the way that we describe it in the farmlands of Ontario, he gave the minister responsible for the Wheat Board the "real blazes" for many things. For one thing, he blamed the minister for the two-price system of wheat that is now in operation in Canada. He said that the Canadian Wheat Board did not want it. Let me say this to you, Mr. Speaker. I, of course, am an easterner. I come from the province of Ontario and I represent a farming area. Would you believe me, Mr. Speaker—

Some hon. Members: No.

Mr. Whicher: —if I told you that there are many farmers in the agricultural areas of Canada who think that western agriculture is getting too much. All of Ontario, all of Newfoundland, all of the province of Quebec and all of Nova Scotia were not in favour of a two-price system because, although people in western Canada had been demanding a two-price system since 1867, the first year it was in operation some \$56 million was deposited into the bank accounts of western agriculture.