

*Grain*

working under very severe weather conditions all the way from the prairies right to the port.

• (10:50 p.m.)

**Mr. R. R. Southam (Qu'Appelle-Moose Mountain):** Mr. Speaker, I believe I would be derelict in my duty as a representative of a rural area of western Canada if I did not take a few minutes to take part in this very important debate this evening. In spite of the criticism we have heard from the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Olson) about my colleague the hon. member for Mackenzie's (Mr. Korchinski) motion I wish to congratulate him for introducing this very important matter before the house at this time.

Last year on November 28 I had the privilege of moving a motion to adjourn the house in order to debate a matter of a national emergency concerning the serious situation that was taking place on the prairies at that time. I can recall, as can the minister and others opposite, that there were no less than 12 members from western Canada supporting me in the house at that time. I believe the defence of the government at that time was pitiful. Now, two months later we are still faced with this serious situation in Western Canada. I deplore the minister trying to defend himself and members of his government by criticizing us for bringing this situation to the attention of the house.

The world knows that in Canada we produce the best quality of wheat. It is because of this that we want to maintain our position in world markets. Despite the Minister of Agriculture saying that we should not be raising this issue there are headlines in every newspaper which one picks up such as, "Grain-drying problem worsening", "Wheat markets facing threat", "Farmers must dry grain at home", and so on. This goes on day after day. These statements come from responsible members of the news media right across Canada. Why should we in this house not defend the interests of the farmers whom we represent.

Although I must admit our congenial Minister of Industry, and Trade and Commerce (Mr. Pepin) tried to mesmerize us somewhat with his very congenial delivery here in the house tonight, he attempted to minimize the situation. He mentioned there was only twice as much wet grain this year as in previous years, when the fact of the matter is there is three times as much.

[Mr. Olson.]

Last November 27 Mr. McNamara, the head of the Canadian Wheat Board, pointed out that the largest amount of damp wheat we ever had was something like 120 million bushels. This year we have 380 million bushels of wet wheat in western Canada and in addition have several hundred million bushels of wheat, coarse grain. This emphasizes the seriousness of the situation. On November 28 I tried to impress the government with the idea that they should get the wet grain to the terminals and this would mean that they would have to get the dry grain moving quickly. As we know, the St. Lawrence Seaway is closed in the winter and our greatest terminals are at Fort William and Port Arthur. At these terminals only approximately 8 million bushels of grain can be dried per month. We should have moved as much as possible to those facilities and left the pipeline to the west coast open. But the government, because of its inexperience or for some reason, took it upon themselves to open up a three bushel quota for wet grain and more or less lull the farmers into an artificial state of complacency by making them think this would solve the problem. Then they immediately plugged up the western pipeline so that when customers placed orders for dry wheat we could not meet the situation.

I have had a good deal of experience in respect of this situation, although I did not do as much homework as the hon. member for Vancouver East (Mr. Winch). It so happens that a few weeks ago I was at the port of Vancouver. I saw there a large number of boats waiting to load grain. At that time, as has been pointed out, there were something like 25 or 26 boats. A number of berths were not being utilized for the simple reason that we did not have the right type of grain to service the boats that were waiting.

As has been pointed out there is the very serious situation in respect of the Wheat Board having to foot the demurrage bill. I hate to think of what the situation will be if Canadian farmers find they have to help to defray the demurrage payments. Members on this side of the house have continued to prod, pound and even hound the government into taking positive action to meet the catastrophic situation which faces western agriculture. There are chiefly three problems. The first is the inefficiency of this government through lack of experience and indifference. The second is the greatest pile-up of damp grain in Canadian history. Then, thirdly, there is the lack of wheat markets which has allowed