

Government Wheat Policy

matter of public importance, namely the catastrophic failure of the government's wheat policy resulting in the imminent loss of 200 million bushels of damp grain through lack of drying facilities, a blow to the economy not only of western Canada but the nation as a whole; and the refusal of the government to undertake necessary measures to deal with the situation.

Mr. Speaker: Would the hon. member please advise the Chair as to the urgency of this matter?

Mr. Southam: I can assure you, Mr. Speaker, I will confine my remarks to the matter of urgency. I am not in the habit of bringing forward motions of this type, but the urgency of this matter is so obvious and the opportunity for dealing with it in the ordinary way so lacking, that I am compelled to deal with it in this way. The occasion for the motion lies in the situation outlined at some length in a statement yesterday by the chief commissioner of the Canadian Wheat Board, Mr. W. C. MacNamara, in Winnipeg.

Briefly, Mr. MacNamara stated that unless immediate action is taken our economy is threatened with the loss through spoilage of some 205 million bushels of wheat stored damp in the bins. In order to show that the matter is not only urgent but also important, I am going to quote a sentence or two from Mr. MacNamara's report:

Even with maximum use of terminal drying facilities the bulk of the tough and damp grain will have to be dried on farms.

• (2:50 p.m.)

And again:

A survey shows that terminal driers, operating at full capacity during the next eight months, would be able to condition about 100 to 150 million bushels of the estimated more than 350 million bushels of tough and damp grain stored on farms.

To emphasize the urgency of this matter, Mr. Speaker, the farmers cannot visualize drying grain for a period of eight months, because if spoilage is going to occur it will take place next spring. Only the climatic conditions of western Canada during the next three or four months, with temperatures around freezing, will preserve the grain over the winter, but after eight months spoilage will have set in.

Even this survey is optimistic, Mr. Speaker, because the truth of the matter is that our total drying capacity in all terminal elevators both inland and at the three ports is only 12 million bushels a month. For anybody who

[Mr. Southam.]

can add and subtract the implications of this statement are clear; and I am sure the Minister of Agriculture can at least add and subtract.

This means a threatened and serious loss of 200 million to 250 million bushels. The loss to the economy is in the neighbourhood of \$300 million, a serious blow to western Canada and to Canada as a whole. This outlines the importance of the matter to the economy.

Dealing with urgency of debate, there is no opportunity under the rules to deal with this matter in the ordinary course of events. I will, however, make a suggestion. If the government will undertake to bring forward the agriculture estimates today, that will satisfy the need for dealing immediately and urgently with a situation which could be catastrophic. The reason the government must act is that farm drying facilities, even if utilized to the full, cannot possibly deal with more than some 50 million bushels a month. This means that a period of five months, drying at full capacity, would be required to save the grain. But within a few months the grain could well be beyond saving.

The only solution I see is for the government, through the wheat board, perhaps by using the provisions of P.F.R.A. or acreage payments, to undertake to provide drying machines to those farmers who do not have them and cannot afford them, in order that the drying out of on-farm grain may begin as soon as possible. This is the only way we can hope to save the major part of the grain.

Government action is required, and required now. That is why I bring this motion forward. There is no other opportunity to deal with it except by bringing forward the estimates immediately. What is required is an immediate statement of intention by the government, and immediate action to provide financing of grain drying equipment. With that assurance farmers could carry on. Without it, our economy will suffer another, perhaps disastrous, blow.

Mr. A. P. Gleave (Saskatoon-Biggar): Mr. Speaker, I want with all the emphasis I can command to support the motion having regard to the urgency of this situation. Some while ago I moved a similar motion asking that this house take time to debate the very serious, even desperate situation that was developing in western Canada. This motion was turned aside, and between then and now we have lost much time to examine and prepare for the very critical situation that exists.