

Wheat—Marketing of Surplus

Can we get any information? Yesterday I tried to ascertain what happened last week when there was a meeting in Washington between Canadian and United States representatives. The Prime Minister (Mr. St. Laurent) said he was not there and apparently did not know. The Minister of Trade and Commerce said that he was not there. If there ever was a conference where nobody was there and yet much apparently was decided it was that of ten days ago in Washington.

What Canadians are asking for today, what the western farmer is asking for today—

Mr. Abbott: Everybody should eat more wheat.

Mr. Diefenbaker: —is something in the nature of a declaration by Canada with respect to the efforts it is making in reference to the United States to prevent anything in the nature of price cutting competition in wheat sales. But all we receive from the minister is a historical review of the thirties. Let me say this about the thirties. The Conservative party inherited exactly the same condition as prevails today as the result of world conditions, and a condition that arose while the Liberal party was in power. It is no use reliving that.

Mr. Abbott: You will not inherit this one, John.

Mr. Diefenbaker: What Canadians want to know is what is the government going to do? What is its policy? What we received tonight was a historical review that gave no hope and little future to the western farmer who has asked parliament today to let him know what the situation is.

On motion of Mr. Diefenbaker the debate was adjourned.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. member for Prince Albert moves that this debate do now adjourn. Before we adjourn I want to make a few observations at this time so that hon. members will consider them and perhaps give me their own views at a later stage. The amendment reads:

This house is of the opinion that in view of the present grave situation in the matter of international wheat trading the government should make an immediate declaration as to its policy respecting the marketing of our Canadian wheat surplus.

Now is it an amendment to ask that the government make an immediate declaration of its policy? An amendment has a certain objective, and the objective is to alter the main question so as to help hon. members state their position on policies. Is it an amendment, even if the amendment to a

[Mr. Diefenbaker.]

motion to go into supply has not to be relevant, to ask that the government make an immediate statement of policy? Is it a parliamentary motion? That is the first question I should like to submit to hon. members.

The second question is this. I was away for a while looking over these amendments, and upon my return to the chair was informed that the Minister of Trade and Commerce (Mr. Howe) had made a speech. When he spoke a moment ago, what did he do? Even if that declaration of policy by the minister was not to the liking of hon. members, is it not a fact the minister has expressed the policy of the government because he is the spokesman with respect to these various matters, and according to the theory of cabinet solidarity he has spoken for the government. Has he not complied with the terms of this amendment? That is another point I should like to submit to hon. members for their serious consideration.

Of course when one considers that the amendment asks for a declaration of policy from the government, one could go a little further. After all the government, by the constitution, are the advisers of Her Majesty. They are the ones who are supposed to propose policy. Can we, by an amendment or by a decision of this house, force the government to declare their policy if they do not wish to do so? I have in my hand here a treatise on parliament by C. Ilbert who was a Clerk of the House of Commons in England and the author of several books. On page 111 of this particular book he says, under the title "administration":

Parliament does not govern. Parliamentary government does not mean government by parliament. Once, and once only, in the course of English history has the House of Commons attempted to administer the affairs of the country through executive committees, and the precedent by the long parliament has not been followed.

What is done by parliament, and especially by the House of Commons, is in the first place to secure that the King's ministers, who control and are responsible for the executive government of the country, shall represent and have the confidence of the party, or combination of parties, which commands a majority in the house, and in the next place to control the action of those ministers by means of questions and criticisms.

Now, is this a criticism? The amendment asks that the government declare a policy immediately. I submit these observations for the benefit of hon. members. Of course if the amendment is not in order, then the sub-amendment is not in order either.

Mr. Knowles: As a subamendment.

Mr. Speaker: Well, at the moment that is what we are considering. It is a subamendment. Considering that now the original question must be laid aside for the time