

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Wednesday, June 29, 1966

The house met at 2.30 p.m.

PRIVILEGE

MR. WOOLLIAMS—STATEMENT BY FINANCE MINISTER RESPECTING WHEAT DELIVERIES

● (2:40 p.m.)

Mr. Eldon M. Woolliams (Bow River): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a question of privilege. I gave notice on June 28, and could have raised this question of privilege yesterday but I did not do so. After the house hears the question of privilege it will understand why. This question of privilege arises out of a lengthy answer on a point of privilege raised by the Minister of Finance (Mr. Sharp) when he said as follows, as reported at page 6871 of *Hansard* of June 27:

On a point of privilege, Mr. Speaker. I think the hon. member's uncorrected statement could do damage to our commercial interests. I have never made any such statement as attributed to me by the hon. member and I deny it.

He was referring to a question I had asked on June 27, as follows:

Then may I put a question to the Minister of Finance. In view of the statement by the Minister of Trade and Commerce and in view of the minister's statement that irreparable damage had been done by the strike, can the minister tell us what is the situation?

I say that the answer by the minister given by way of privilege may reflect on my integrity in setting out the facts, and does reflect on what are the facts. On page 6053 of *Hansard* of June 7, 1966 in reference to the strike and its effect on deliveries of grain from western Canada to Russia, my question was as follows:

A supplementary question, Mr. Speaker. In view of the statement of the Minister of Labour I would like to now put a question to the Minister of Finance. What effect has this long strike had on the fulfilment of the wheat contracts that were made by the wheat board with other nations?

The Minister of Finance answered:

Mr. Speaker, this strike is having a very serious effect.

Then I asked as follows:

A further supplementary question, Mr. Speaker. When the minister says "a very serious effect" does he mean that sales will be lost in respect of wheat agreements made between the wheat board and those countries purchasing our grain?

The Minister of Finance replied:

I do not know whether this in fact will happen. I do not think it need happen. All I can say is that this strike is having a very serious effect upon the delivery of grain—

May I pause there; "a very serious effect upon the delivery of grain". He meant in my opinion the delivery of grain to fill the contracts with Russia, when there were 23 boats waiting to be loaded. He went on to say:

—that the wheat board has already sold, and it is beginning to back up the movement into the country, making it more difficult for the wheat board to equalize its quotas.

In reference to this may I say that the Minister of Finance is responsible for the wheat board, and I would think that statements made by Mr. McNamara, the head of the wheat board, would be statements of which he would approve; or if he did not I would think by this time he would have made his position clear to Mr. McNamara. I should like to quote from the minutes of proceedings and evidence of the standing committee on agriculture, forestry and rural development of June 7, 1966, at page 381. Mr. McNamara was appearing before this committee and said:

In fact, we were not only on schedule but considerably ahead of schedule, up until a few weeks ago. But of course, now they are very dissatisfied because they have 23 boats waiting for wheat and it is expensive when you charter freight and cannot get delivery. The Russians therefore are now very dissatisfied and I can understand this dissatisfaction because, as I tried to explain earlier, this is the period of time when they need imported wheat. Their new crops will be coming in and they will not be so dependent upon the imported wheat. There is no doubt in my mind that the delay at this time, in Canada meeting her commitments is going to have far reaching effects against Canada. We know from our experience last year in Vancouver, when our shipments were delayed and we had strike conditions there, that we have not yet recovered from the effect of those strikes. Because many buyers who normally were coming to Vancouver with confidence are now reluctant and are asking a lot of questions before they will enter into commitments from Vancouver. We also know that shipowners are now charging a higher freight rate from Vancouver than previously prevailed, which is making the Vancouver wheat more expensive and not as attractive—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. I am wondering whether it is necessary for the hon. member to go to such lengths to put his question of privilege. I suggest that he come to the point soon.