

Wheat Sales

question the comments of the hon. member for Crowfoot and perhaps at some future time he will expand on his criticism of known commitments.

Mr. Horner (Battleford-Kindersley): Do you want us to give it away to the communists?

Mr. Knight: The remark made by the hon. member's brother is a ridiculous one and not worth commenting on.

Mr. Horner (Battleford-Kindersley): Are you voting against the motion?

Mr. Knight: Yes, I am voting against it, in case hon. gentlemen to my left are not clear where I stand. The motion condemns the government for failing to maximize wheat sales at top world prices and for otherwise failing to permit the board to operate in a positive and efficient manner in the best interest of the Canadian wheat farmer.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Who says they are not attacking the Wheat Board?

Mr. Knight: The Canadian Wheat Board is in charge of selling and pricing and it tries to get the best price it can for western producers. The chairman of the board has already said that they have to protect the interests of western producers. To my mind, this motion is one of non-confidence in the Canadian Wheat Board and I find that outrageous and indefensible. I do not think this parliament should end at this time on the basis of an attack by the Conservative Party on the Canadian Wheat Board.

Mr. Jack Murta (Lisgar): Mr. Speaker, I welcome the chance to participate in this debate, especially following some of the comments made by one whom I used to think was my honourable friend, the hon. member for Assiniboia (Mr. Knight), though I am not sure right now. There has been what I consider to be a certain amount of untruth injected into this debate. The motion moved by the hon. member for Crowfoot (Mr. Horner) reads in part as follows:

This House condemns the government and the minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board for failing to maximize wheat sales at top world prices and for otherwise failing to permit the board to operate in a positive and efficient manner in the best interest of the Canadian wheat farmer—

I realize the hon. member for Assiniboia is not a farmer.

Mr. Horner (Crowfoot): None of the party is.

Mr. Murta: I suppose you would call him an academic, and if he is an academic he should at least be able to read and to interpret properly a motion that is presented to the House of Commons.

There have also been insinuations that we in the Conservative Party would like to see the Wheat Board destroyed. That is completely untrue. I think it would be proper to say, though, that we on this side of the House, as well as most farmers in western Canada, I think—

Mr. Alexander: Order back there.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Boulanger): Order, please. I think we should carry on the debate with more order. It is

hard for the Chair to follow the speech of the hon. member, and I wish we could have order in the House.

Mr. Murta: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I was saying, I think that the Conservative Party, as well as most western farmers, believe in the concept of the Canadian Wheat Board, but there are certain changes that can be made.

Mr. Benjamin: Like what?

Mr. Murta: Nothing is perfect. I think there could be a lot of changes made both domestically, within the Wheat Board itself, and also from the international point of view, and I believe this is something we should be looking at. The motion before the House does not refer to this. However, when it is said that we are against the Wheat Board's marketing system, that is completely wrong. It has been said that we would perhaps like to see some changes made, such as a freer movement of grain within Canada and other changes to our marketing approach, and in this regard I think we are in tune with the feelings of most farmers, in western Canada at least.

The point we are trying to convey to the Liberal Party and the NDP is that we believe the Wheat Board has been selling grain at a low price compared with its own asking price. We are saying very simply that we would like this parliament to give the western wheat producers an extra 30 cents a bushel for their grain sold in the 1972-73 crop year.

● (2010)

I think we are on firm ground in saying that the Wheat Board has sold grain too cheaply. About two weeks ago I directed a question to the minister responsible for the Wheat Board and cited the prices at which we had sold grain in the first quarter of 1973. To some extent the minister confirmed those prices. I have the prices before me and I will run through them very quickly.

In March we sold wheat to the United Kingdom at \$2.42 a bushel when the asking price was \$2.97. We sold wheat to the U.S.S.R. at \$1.73 when the asking price was \$2.96. We sold wheat to the People's Republic of China at \$1.97 when the asking price was \$2.92. We sold wheat to Japan at \$2.67 a bushel when the asking price at that time was \$3.01. We were selling wheat at that time to 24 countries at an average loss of 79 cents per bushel over the Wheat Board's own asking price at Vancouver.

The figures I have given were taken from a report issued by Statistics Canada. On checking them further I find they are based on Customs documents signed either by the Wheat Board or the country which purchased the wheat. They are also based on grade statistics from the Canada Grains Commission. There is no point in talking about volume unless you are also talking about an approximate grade. This is another reason we feel it is in the best interests of western farmers for the Wheat Board to pay another 30 cents per bushel for wheat produced in the 1972-73 crop year. It might also be noted that as far as Drum wheat is concerned—and we have not touched on this—the average contract price of the Wheat Board at that time was 75 cents a bushel below the Wheat Board's own asking price.