

*Supply—Agriculture*

uttered not a word on this subject. He had no report to give the house as to what action the government had taken, or was contemplating to deal with this situation.

To me, this smacks of a most casual and indifferent attitude on the part of the minister. It is an attitude of unmitigated gall and amounts to an insult to the farmers of western Canada. It is an extension of what happened last May during the election campaign, when the leader of the Liberal party paid so much attention to farm policy that in the course of travelling between Newfoundland and Vancouver he handed one out through the window of his airplane at Winnipeg.

The whole government knows why these estimates are before the committee today. The grain crisis in western Canada, and its solution, involves not only the Minister of Agriculture and the Minister of Trade and Commerce but also the Minister without Portfolio, who is supposed to be in charge of the Wheat Board. Incidentally, I wonder what has happened to some of the other prairie liberals—the hon. members for Assiniboia and Provencher. I make no apology to the hon. member for Fraser Valley East and a few others in this house for talking about wheat at this time.

First, I want to say that the government has received repeated warnings about the situation since mid-September. While it might be said that on September 15 or 20 those warnings were premature, or the fears expressed were exaggerated, they have since proved well justified. Representations to the minister on this subject were continued by the farm organizations, by those interested in the grain industry and by members of the House of Commons belonging to opposition parties. I do not doubt for a moment that there were backbenchers on the other side who also expressed warnings and requested that action be taken. Well, we were given repeated assurances that the situation was in hand.

I wish to refer to three factors in this situation—box cars, grain dryers and terminals. We were assured that the railways were co-operating. Mr. Chairman, the supply of railway equipment for the movement of damp and tough grain is still done on a hit or miss basis. The fact is that not only are insufficient cars being supplied but those which are being sent are being allocated inequitably; the railways are only co-operating to the extent that fits in with their own transportation priorities and requirements. A request was made to the

Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce a few days ago that the government appoint a transport controller with complete authority to assess the situation and the requirements at each shipping point in the three prairie provinces and northwestern British Columbia, to co-ordinate the work of the grain companies and terminals for the receiving, drying, forwarding and storage of the grain and, most important of all, require—and I underline that word “require”—the railways to supply the rolling stock and motive power necessary to move damp and tough grain in record time.

At the moment there is no one person or agency responsible for overseeing and co-ordinating the use of railway equipment for grain movement. Instead there is a confused conglomeration of three government departments, three government agencies, three railway companies, all the grain companies and terminals. All these organizations pass the buck among themselves; none seems to know what the others have done or are doing. The inequities in the allocation of box cars as between shipping points at dozens of locations on the prairies smacks of sheer incompetence and indifference on the part of the railways and of the government. Where the railways have been allowed, under Liberal governments, to cancel or suspend scheduled freight or mixed train service, points on some of these lines all too often go two or three weeks without any local train service at all. This is why they do not get box cars. These branch lines suffer unfair treatment as compared with lines where there is a regular, scheduled train service. This unfair allocation of box cars as between subdivisions and as between individual shipping points is not new. It has been going on since the beginning of the bumper crops in 1950-51, and it has become impossible to accept any longer. When it continues in a situation such as faces us this year, marked by the piling up of so much damp and tough grain, it becomes completely incomprehensible.

Let me cite some specific examples. I mentioned in an earlier debate a shipping point called Tate, Saskatchewan. This is a siding on the Canadian National main line between Semans and Nokomis. There are three elevators with a capacity of 114,000 bushels. Mr. Chairman, not one box car was loaded there from July 5 to October 23.

My next example is Tullis, Saskatchewan. This is a dandy. It is in the constituency of the hon. member for Moose Jaw, and is on a