

Grain

• (9:50 p.m.)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Béchard): Order. The hon. member for Assiniboia (Mr. Douglas).

Mr. Douglas: On a question of privilege, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member said that I stated the farmers would be willing to take less money for their wheat. I said the farmers would be willing to take a little less in order to pay the extra transportation charges that may be necessary to bring wheat from—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Béchard): Order. The hon. member for Crowfoot (Mr. Horner).

Mr. Horner: That is no question of privilege, Mr. Speaker. I said that the hon. member stated the farmers would be willing to take less money. That is what he did say. I do not know what excuse he gave for that; whether it was transportation costs or any other kind of costs. In any event, farmers are going to take less under this government because of the rail line abandonment program and increased transportation costs, if nothing else. These extra charges are being faced by the farmers right in the hon. member's own constituency.

Farmers are not prepared to take less money. Many farmers have to take less in order to meet the interest payments on the huge amounts of money they have had to borrow in order to seed and harvest their crops, despite the fact that their crops are not moving to the market and the minister who is responsible for seeing that they move is not doing his job properly.

During the minister's speech I asked him how long ago the co-ordinating committee was set up. He did not give a direct answer; he tried to say it was set up some time ago. A co-ordinating committee was set up in Winnipeg. Winnipeg is not the problem; Vancouver is the problem. This co-ordinating committee was set up in Vancouver less than two weeks ago in order to co-ordinate and facilitate the movement of grain. This is not good enough. It should have been set up some time ago.

The minister should go to Vancouver and get the interested parties together. If the railroads are having difficulty in getting together, the minister should meet the heads of the railroad companies and find a way to facilitate the movement of grain. There should be huge trainloads of dry grain moving to Vancouver from the prairies, from southern Saskatchewan and southern Alberta. There is in

[Mr. Horner.]

this part of the country a huge amount of grain that normally moves to Vancouver. If the job were handled properly, the 33 ships there could be loaded with trainload after trainload of dry grain. Then we could carry on with the program of drying damp grain. Despite the problem that we face in this regard, all we have is this business of someone saying, "What is my job?" The people who should be concerned with dealing with the problem do not know what their job is. In this situation, how can leadership be given to the department concerned with handling the problem?

The Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Olson) sits on the other side of the chamber very silently and glumly, looking at the problem which he wished to handle in his department. But the Prime Minister does not place that much trust in him either. He says, "No, we cannot give him this responsibility. We will give him the dairy problem, and that's all." He might know something more about the problem, being a member from western Canada. I question his judgment too, but I urge the Prime Minister to give him a chance and place the Wheat Board under his control. The hon. member for Saskatoon-Humboldt (Mr. Lang) might even do a better job. Surely if these ministers recognized what their jobs were, they would have enough ability to handle them.

The Prime Minister is not doing his job by ignoring a problem that is so vital to a major part of the economic life of western Canada. He has put the problem in the hands of one who is a very amiable, nice person but who knows absolutely nothing about the problem he is supposed to handle. Surely the Prime Minister cannot say that he is doing his job when he allows this situation to continue.

I urge the Prime Minister, who is sitting in the house listening to this debate, to reconsider the make-up of his cabinet. The minister concerned could carry on as minister of trade and commerce, but the Wheat Board should be placed within the responsibility of someone who is more capable, at least on the surface, of looking after these matters.

For the past year we have had the problem of damp grain. There has been no action in this respect. There has been a ball-up of our transportation facilities. Now, there is a ball-up at Vancouver Harbour where 33 ships are waiting to load grain. Many of these ships are paying demurrage charges. These charges, amounting to \$25 a day, are coming out of the farmers' pockets. The demurrage charges for