

Wheat Export Prices

Hon. Jean-Luc Pepin (Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce): Mr. Speaker, I listened with great care to the two previous speeches, and in particular to the last words of the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Stanfield) about action. They brought to my mind something that was said about his predecessor, namely, that he mistook acting for action. I point out again that I listened with great care. When he spoke about what kind of action is needed, the only thing he could come up with was the solution offered by the right hon. member for Prince Albert (Mr. Diefenbaker) when he was prime minister, namely, acreage payments. This is a remedy of some kind, but it is my hope that if we were to adopt this solution we will try to do it with somewhat more refinement than the way in which it was done in 1958, 1960 and 1962. Obviously it did not solve the problem at that time. If it had, we would not have to deal with it today.

An hon. Member: Who is acting now?

• (4:00 p.m.)

Mr. Pepin: Again may I say that I listened with great care to the Leader of the Opposition and to the leader of the New Democratic party (Mr. Douglas). For example, the Leader of the Opposition said that the Canadian government has been "trailing behind developments" regarding wheat, and he said "We derive very little benefit from this process".

We tried desperately hard and are still trying to save the International Grains Arrangement. In the process we may have lost a number of sales, but it was worth the effort. The other day in Washington when the Australians made a great to-do about getting out of the road temporarily in order to accommodate other exporter members of the I.G.A., I had no hesitation in saying we had made our effort previously. It was six months ago that Canada contributed greatly to the maintenance of this agreement. In my view the sacrifices we made at that time were worth while.

The Leader of the Opposition points to the fact that by "trailing behind" we may have done wrong—that may be too strong a word—to the Canadian wheat economy, and he points to the United States as an example of a country that has moved ahead. I do not see it this way. Last year the United States sold 750 million bushels; this year they are down to 525 million bushels. This should help me make the point that I thought I had made

[Mr. Stanfield.]

previously, namely, that this is not exclusively a Canadian problem; it is an international problem. For this reason I believe we have to find the right combination in trying to influence events and also in adapting to those events.

I was in Washington just a week ago. I have spent five days there in the last month. I was in Washington with representatives of the other exporter members of the I.G.A. Canada tried as hard as possible to prevent a collapse of wheat prices in the world. We tried to restore co-operation among exporters under the I.G.A., without this co-operation nothing can be done.

I have been asked in the house on a number of occasions to say what kind of success or failure we had. I said on a number of occasions that I did not know. I think the Leader of the Opposition and the Leader of the New Democratic party should give me credit for not having tried to take them down the golden path in any way. I was very sincere in my answers, because I did not know. Nobody else knew—neither the Leader of the Opposition nor the leader of the New Democratic party—exactly what would happen, because wheat marketing depends upon a number of circumstances that are not within the exclusive control of the Canadian government. Two things the Canadian government does not control are the weather and the policies of other countries.

Mr. Woolliams: Mr. Speaker, would the minister permit a question? He is dealing with this matter on an international basis, as if it were an international crisis. For six weeks 29 ships were waiting in Vancouver harbour. Was that an international problem or a problem of this government?

Mr. Pepin: Mr. Speaker, I believe I have answered the hon. member's question on a number of occasions. Weather had a great deal to do with that situation, but I cannot convince those who do not want to be convinced to accept my views.

We tried very hard at Washington. On Friday afternoon the Americans announced the "corrective measures" they were taking. As is known by now, they were reducing the price of ordinary, hard, red, winter wheat at Gulf and Atlantic ports by 12 cents a bushel.

A number of other specific cuts have been made by the United States for other types of wheat. I have since been asked by the press whether I was surprised by these announcements. I have been asked whether they were