

Grain

up. Sometimes I have doubts about my competence, but having listened to the last speaker I was reminded of the famous words of a well known gentleman, who said, "When I look at myself I am a bit embarrassed, but when I compare myself with others I am cheered". At one point we were getting rather far from Vancouver and from the situation that exists there.

The motion which we have before us is full of impressive phrases, such as "paralysis in wheat movement in Vancouver harbour", "loss of a 17,000 ton contract", the possible loss of others, "stagnation in the movement of wheat". The hon. member for Mackenzie (Mr. Korchinski), with his usual enthusiasm, added additional big phrases, such as "serious decline in our sales" and "nothing is moving". That is about the mood that he has tried to create, though I am sure most of the house and the country does not agree with him.

The hon. member is making mistakes, though involuntary and unconscious ones, I am sure. He is also guilty of some exaggerations. My colleague the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Olson), the Minister without Portfolio (Mr. Lang) and myself will demonstrate this tonight. However, in doing so none of us will deny that we do have a serious situation here. The Wheat Board says that we have 31 ships loading or waiting for grain in Vancouver. Others have said there are 29 and 30, and someone said 33, but the official figure is 31.

I should like, first of all, to try to define the problem. At the root of the grain movement problem this crop year is the fact that farmers harvested last fall all time record quantities of tough and damp grain, and the quantities which must be handled are double that of any other year. This is regrettable but the government could not do anything to prevent that situation. It is well known that government can do many things, but it cannot change the weather.

The second fact which must be borne in mind is that the handling of high moisture grain is a slow, time consuming process. As an example—and this is only an example—terminal operators are finding that in some cases it takes several hours to unload a boxcar of high moisture grain, as opposed to minutes for dry grain. Again the government cannot change this situation.

Unusually severe winter weather has greatly cut down on the efficiency of railroad equipment. As an example, yesterday in Edmonton the temperature was 40 below zero,

[Mr. Pepin.]

though had the hon. member for Calgary North (Mr. Woolliams) been there it might have gone up a few degrees! This means, for instance, that a diesel engine normally capable of hauling 80 to 100 cars of grain can haul only 30. Again that is a situation that the government, however capable, cannot change.

Another factor is that the demand for Canadian grain from westcoast ports has been stronger than could have been anticipated. I have already said that; I will repeat it and provide the house with statistics on the subject in a moment. The desire to move the largest possible volume of high moisture grain to Vancouver terminals for drying and for export purposes has conflicted with efforts to meet this increased demand for dry grain.

I have already said that we have here a conflict between two very desirable objectives and purposes. One is the movement of maximum quantities of damp grain to terminal elevators for drying and export; the other very worth-while objective is the achievement of maximum exports. As I have indicated, we have had some unexpected export commitments to meet on top of expected export commitments. That is a situation to which I have often referred and has to do with Chinese and Japanese sales as well.

The simplest solution would have been to cut back on sales from Vancouver. After the results of the harvest were known, the Wheat Board was aware that there would be serious transportation and handling problems this year. The Wheat Board could have taken the easy way out and simply limited sales to safe levels. Instead they opted to maximize sales and tried to solve transportation problems. Had they not done so, hon. members on the other side would be accusing us for the loss of sales, and the hon. member for Mackenzie (Mr. Korchinski) tonight accused us in fact for the loss of one sale in particular. His allegation is not correct.

• (9:10 p.m.)

Mr. Woolliams: You lost more than one sale.

Mr. Pepin: One can imagine what hon. members of the Conservative party would have said if the Wheat Board, acting on conservative principles, had been afraid to take any chances. Hon. gentlemen of the Conservative party would have been among the first to accuse the Wheat Board or most preferably the minister responsible for the Wheat Board, for not being daring enough.