

normal times, the Government turning aside and engaging in what is purely mercantile business?

Mr. BURRELL: I am glad my hon. friend thinks times are entirely normal, and that they do not justify action. The action we took is justified to this extent, that it has met with the most widespread gratification throughout the country affected, and even through the East, to such an extent that in Quebec Premier Sir Lomer Gouin was exceedingly anxious to avail himself of this opportunity in his province because the farmers there were very short of good seed. Unfortunately, he applied a little too late, and the only way in which I could help them out was to get the Purchasing Wheat Export Company to release some of the best of their grain in the Montreal elevators. The circumstances were not normal. In 1916, we had lost at least \$100,000,000 worth of wheat by the wheat rust of the West. Western members, of course, know these facts. The result was that in at least thirty municipalities there was danger of the farmers not being able to get any good seed. It is true they could have secured it through private parties, but we thought the national situation was grave enough, with the absolute necessity of getting every ounce of production we could, for the Government to step in and, in this way through the expert officials of the department to secure, by purchase and resale, the very best class of seed that those people could have. With all due deference to my hon. friend I must say that, although it is not usually good policy for a government to go in and do these things, the conditions existing at that time justified the Government in stepping in and taking that action.

Mr. SINCLAIR: The minister has not yet told us whether the bills for the purchase of this grain are paid through the Finance Department or how they are paid. It would be a very objectionable matter if they were paid without reference to the official course through the Finance Department.

Mr. BURRELL: The matter is all arranged through the Finance Department.

Mr. SINCLAIR: I understood from the discussion that the minister was a little uncertain as to how the business was really done—where the money goes when it is paid in by the farmers or who keeps the accounts. I trust the minister understands how those matters are handled.

Mr. BURRELL: Yes.

[Mr. Macdonald.]

Mr. SINCLAIR: What is the minister's policy for the future? Is it intended that there shall be a regular distribution each spring to the farmers of Canada, and will it be open in all the provinces for the farmers to come to the minister for their seed if they find that more convenient than buying in the usual way? If we are to understand that there was not an emergency, we want to know what is to happen next year, and what is to be done with the 50,000 bushels we have on hand.

Mr. BURRELL: I would not like to lay down, at this particular moment, what might be the policy for the future. So far it has been open to farmers of other provinces to avail themselves of this opportunity of buying seed grain. I have already explained that it was open last year, and a large amount of oats was shipped to the eastern provinces because those provinces were short of the best seed oats. The policy is sufficiently justified by its results to be continued, especially at a time like this when war is on and when the production of grain is of such vital importance. Anything that can help the farmers to get first-class seed grain at a moderate price in order to ensure a fuller crop would go a long way towards justifying the Government to do what they would probably not do under normal circumstances.

Mr. MACDONALD: How does a farmer in an eastern province apply when he wants to purchase seed grain from the Government?

Mr. BURRELL: Last year notices were put in the press giving the particulars. The applications were made to the Seed Department, and we kept in touch with the Seed Purchasing Commission constantly as to what stores were on hand and what the transportation facilities were. Very full publicity was given to the whole matter.

Mr. KNOWLES: I do not think this item should go through. We are without information on nearly every point. To start with, we find a very abnormal condition of affairs in regard to the use of the Governor General's warrants.

There has been no explanation why the transaction was effected in that way, and I think the committee should have an explanation before we are asked to ratify it—it goes without saying that before we ratify an unusual proceeding we should know why it was done in an unusual way.