

Western Grain Stabilization

an unreliable shipper of grain. Demurrage charges for the 1974 crop year totalled some \$17 million, and we are told the figure will be substantially greater in the crop year which will end this July.

● (1530)

We have lost millions and millions of dollars as a result of failure to ship our grain at a time when prices were high, and the resulting depression of the market has cost producers very heavily. Customers have been lost that will never be regained. The port of Vancouver is a big question mark. It seems that most western producers are now looking to the port of Seattle as a logical substitute. I was talking to members of the Wheat Board this morning and was told that a huge vessel has been in the port of Vancouver since February 11, taking on cargo for Bangladesh under our foreign aid program. It has been there for close to three months being loaded. This is nothing but sheer waste.

I must say that since I have been a member of this House, never before have I sensed the frustration, anger and feeling of anxiety that now exists on the part of western grain producers owing to failure to move their products to market because of strikes and work stoppages, with seemingly no recourse for them. Moreover, I believe the anxiety is compounded by the fact that the producers feel that the federal government hasn't a handle on the situation. We seem to be going from bad to worse. The gentleman in charge of the Canada-Japan Trade Council, Colonel Houston, speaking to the Palliser Wheat Growers Association on January 9 last had this to say:

Canada is now an enigma to many foreigners. On the specific question of Canada as a trading partner, a business partner, she is now looked upon by many as an unreliable supplier and an uncertain place in which to invest. It should not be necessary, especially before this audience, to stress the degree of our national dependence upon export markets. For Canada, exporting is the very breath of life. All our hopes for an ever-rising standard of living, for remaining in the forefront of developed nations, depends directly upon our ability to maintain and expand our overseas markets—

One of the most frequent causes of disruption in our distribution system lies in the area of labour-management disagreement. In my opinion, this is due to an archaic concept of labour-management relations which has become entrenched in the thinking of government, of labour and of management. This system, involving as it does confrontation, is sadly out of tune with the times and with the circumstances prevailing in this country.

I think that sums up the situation very well. I know that the producers of this country would be very much happier if we were considering legislation to deal with this issue, this crippling enigma, rather than being sidetracked by this bill. No wonder the producers of Canada are angered and frustrated, subjected as they are to the whims of 30 to 35 labour unions involved in the movement of grain. Any one of these labour unions can tie up indefinitely the movement of grain bound for export, with no protection being given to the farmers: they become the sole victims of the irresponsible actions of other groups.

Surely it is time the government recognized that they have a major responsibility in this area to come up with some kind of new mechanism to protect farmers and alleviate financial losses attributed to labour disputes and disruptions, which in turn cause not only lost sales but direct out of pocket expenses on the part of producers. As reported at page 4198 of *Hansard*, the minister in charge of

[Mr. Mazankowski.]

the Wheat Board was asked this question by the hon. member for Battle River (Mr. Malone):

Mr. Speaker, I wish to direct this question to the minister in charge of the Canadian Wheat Board. Inasmuch as I know of no business where two parties can incur an expense and charge it to an innocent third party, has there been any investigation by the Ministry of Justice as to the legality of charging demurrage to farmers or will there be any investigation as to the farmers' right to sue in relation to demurrage charges?

The minister replied as follows:

Mr. Speaker, I am sure those against whom demurrage charges are sought are fully aware of their rights with regard to civil liability and will defend accordingly.

I wish the minister would explain in more detail precisely what he means. I am no lawyer, Mr. Speaker, and certainly I am not a dean of law; but if what the minister is saying is true, then the Canadian Wheat Board, being a trustee or custodian of the farmers, should have the option of initiating legal action in the courts against those who are responsible. I am not sure what the minister is saying, but the Canadian Wheat Board is supposed to act on behalf of the farmers, as it does in terms of selling and handling grain. This is why I suggest the Canadian Wheat Board should take the initiative against those who cause disruptions in the movement of grain which result in millions and millions of dollars lost by the producers.

I suggest, Mr. Speaker, that if the minister is not prepared to do something along those lines, then perhaps he should be prepared to recommend to his cabinet colleagues that the federal treasury pick up the tab for these demurrage charges, because that is what the farmers are asking for. In conclusion, if legislation were brought before the House at least to lay the groundwork for dealing with the disruptive effects of strikes and proposing a new mechanism to improve the collective bargaining process, it would be heralded with a great deal more enthusiasm than this legislation.

Mr. Stan Schellenberger (Wetaskiwin): Mr. Speaker, while I was not here when the Prairie Grain Stabilization Act was brought forward, I have studied the debate and some newspaper reports of that time. I have also listened very carefully to the hon. member for Vegreville (Mr. Mazankowski), who took part in that debate. I should like to say something later in my remarks about that act. I can only echo the sentiments of the hon. member for Vegreville regarding labour strife in this country. As I travel across my riding, farmers raise the subject over and over again. They feel, for proper reasons, that they are being done out of income that is properly theirs by the number of unions that are striking in one way or another, thus preventing their product from getting to market and obtaining the best possible price.

I am pleased to take part in this debate on the western grain stabilization bill. Few people today would argue that there is not a great need for stabilization. Rather than lopping off the peak of the prairie farmer's income, we need something that will take into consideration the low prices that many farmers receive for their products. They must obtain the best possible price because of the high input costs they are facing.