

Supply—Finance

respective responsibilities of the Canadian Wheat Board and the minister in charge of that board. All I can say in reply to that argument is that it goes back to the same sort of thing we had to endure from ministers of Liberal governments from 1945 right up to 1957.

I refer to the attitude that the Canadian Wheat Board is a separate power unto itself, that it has no responsibility to the people who set it up. This attitude is completely erroneous and morally wrong. The farmers have put their fate in the hands of the Canadian Wheat Board and the only place they have for their views to be represented effectively is this House of Commons. We do have an advisory committee but every member of that committee with one exception is a representative of the various organizations dealing with grain. The one exception is the man we always appoint as a matter of tradition, a farmers' union representative.

I point that out because the political issue raised by the Minister of Finance today must be given an answer once and for all. The people have accepted and like the idea of the wheat board marketing their grain. They recognize that it is a socialistic type of operation, they recognize that they have given up their freedom in this regard, but they do expect somebody and some organization to speak for them. This point has to be realized by the minister. This is where a previous minister and his deputy minister let us down. The actions of Mr. Howe, or his lack of action, were what destroyed not only Mr. Howe but Mr. Gardiner.

Mr. Sharp: I thought it was the pipe line.

Mr. Hamilton: If you go back and read Mr. Gardiner's statements made in the west during the five or six years before 1957, you will find that over and over again he begged his farm audiences not to blame him for what Mr. Howe was doing but to point the finger at Mr. Howe. I do not know what Mr. Howe's personal thoughts were. All I know is the end result of the type of action he carried out and that was a lack of interest on his part in the Canadian Wheat Board and a lack of defence of the farmers' interests.

To be precise, Mr. Chairman, what are the farmers' interests? Once you commit yourself to a controlled system of marketing grain such as we have under the Canadian Wheat Board there has to be a tremendous amount of constant, daily effort to see that the farmers' interests are not harmed. Let me give the

[Mr. Hamilton.]

minister a few examples. First of all I refer to the question of box cars. The wheat board has no power under any act to control the railways of this country. The wheat board has no power really under the act to control the grain companies, and in grain companies I include the pool and private elevator associations.

One of the first things we did as a government was to have a westerner, Mr. Bracken, look into the question of box car allotment. He made certain recommendations. I do not want to go into the details of box car allotment but I raise it as an example of the wheat board not having the power to deal with the problem, and this situation was responsible for the rising antagonism against them in 1956 and 1957. This was due to the indifference of Mr. Howe and all those around him, an indifference which was costing the farmers money.

Everybody knows that when the farmers tried to protest to Mr. Howe the only chance they got to do so was at public meetings. I am thinking, for example, of the meeting held in Manitoba when Mr. Howe poked a farmer in the stomach and said, "You don't look too badly fed". This was the type of attitude that set the west in rebellion. During the last few years this minister and his predecessors have been guilty of the same crime against western farmers and the wheat board as was Mr. Howe.

Let me give some examples, Mr. Chairman. Under the Canadian Wheat Board Act there is nothing—the minister is quite correct in this—that lays down what the minister shall do precisely. Really the minister has only to report to the house. The minister is quite right in interpreting the act in that way. But the way the matter has worked out is that the minister must take an interest in the Canadian Wheat Board; he must protect the interests of the farmers. The only way he can make the wheat board system work in a humane, non-discriminatory way is by co-operating with the wheat board on several intimate matters.

Here are two examples of the kind of thing in which the minister must take an active interest in his relationship with the Canadian Wheat Board. One is the domestic handling of grain. For many years there has obviously been a problem with regard to box cars. It is not a new problem. The wheat board has no power in this connection. All they can do is call in the representatives of the railways and terminal management and say to them,