

Supply—Agriculture

It is all very well for the Minister of Trade and Commerce to rush down to Washington and extract a few cents out of them when what we should be getting is at least 25 cents more for a bushel of our western wheat. That is what the western farmer wants and what he needs. What is the use of producing the world's finest wheat if the government is going to dump it on the market like so much garbage? The farmer does not want throw-away wheat, nor does he want give-away wheat. The western farmer is feeling the pinch and the whole Canadian economy will feel it when the returns are in. The government can look to itself for having bungled the wheat situation by its amateur tactics.

On September 27 the minister said in the house that he was disappointed with our sales to Japan. The western farmers are also disappointed. We are disappointed with the whole sorry story of government bumbling and inability to drive a bargain on behalf of the producers. We have done our share and we do not relish being undercut by the government's incompetence. We realize that the wheat boom is over at present. It is not over because people all round the world do not need our wheat. It is over because the government has not done its job properly. I suggest that if they cannot sell wheat and carry on successful negotiations they should take the advice of the hon. member for Qu'Appelle who has an outstanding record in this respect.

In recent years wheat has become the mainstay of our nation's economy. Under this government it is once again being relegated to a secondary position. Here is a government which spends its time and the taxpayers' money on phony publicity stunts like the war on poverty, reports on American investment, without which we could not live in this country, and a host of other meaningless and time-wasting schemes and programs. At the same time it is unable to look after the basic housekeeping of this nation, such as the sale of wheat, keeping prices and taxes down and giving to Canadians the opportunity to expand in the prosperity which should be ours. The government has frittered away prosperity. Now they come to us expecting congratulations because, as they say, they have kept us out of the poorhouse. Canada's wheat is needed. The market is there. The production is there. It is up to the government to come back to reality and forget about the leadership ambitions of some of its members. They should rather look after the essential business of the country.

[Mr. Watson (Assiniboia).]

Another factor leading to insecurity is the question of how much wheat China will take next year. The government is saying nothing about that. If there is a serious falling off in the amount of wheat that China buys from us the economy, not only of western Canada but of the nation in general, will be in deep trouble. We want the government and the minister to give us the facts on these matters. We want from the minister an assurance that he and his department will get the wheat moving. We want an assurance as to prices and the volume of sales so that farmers can have some idea of what the future holds under this government.

• (5:40 p.m.)

The whole picture is one of uncertainty and it is growing worse day by day. The decline of 100 million bushels in exports this year at a time when United States sales are picking up cannot be explained to the Canadian farmer. I suggest that neither the Minister of Agriculture nor the Minister of Trade and Commerce go to western Canada and attempt to justify that situation. If either of them really has leadership ambitions he should think very seriously of a way to solve the wheat problem. There has to be a stepped-up selling campaign. We do not intend to return to the days when the western producer was a sitting duck for the lack of activity on the part of the government. The wheat situation is extremely grave, so not only the western farmer but the whole Canadian economy and the government had better get moving on it at once.

Western agriculture is in a serious situation. The constituency I represent includes approximately 45 rural municipalities. Of those rural municipalities, approximately 38 will receive P.F.A.A. payments during the year 1968. Whenever this number of farmers receives P.F.A.A. payments it is a good indication that western agriculture is in a serious situation. Last evening the minister mentioned the Farm Credit Corporation and the amount of money that had been borrowed from that organization. I believe he said that in 1962 about \$78 million had been lent by the Farm Credit Corporation and in 1966 the amount was \$234 million. I can assure the minister and the members of this committee that no farmer in western Canada is proud of borrowing money. If he had the money in his pocket which he should have he would not have to go to the Farm Credit Corporation to borrow these amounts.