

Urgency of Debate on Wheat Prices

Hon. A. J. MacEachen (Minister of National Health and Welfare): Mr. Speaker, it is understandable that following the summer adjournment there should be arising matters of public interest which deserve special attention in the early days of the resumed session. Yesterday there was a motion to discuss another serious matter affecting the welfare of Canadian citizens. A similar matter has been raised today.

● (2:50 p.m.)

The normal order of business set down for today involves consideration of two important bills, and we are ready to deal with those today. But if it is agreeable to hon. members opposite, Mr. Speaker, in order to meet the problems posed by yesterday's question and the second one today, I would be agreeable to have the estimates of the Department of Trade and Commerce called tomorrow, which would permit a discussion of this matter.

Mr. Starr: I rise on a question of privilege. The government house leader met me earlier and I wanted to know the business of the house for the balance of the week. He intimated to me that the government was prepared to bring forward the estimates of the Department of Labour, vote 35, so we could discuss housing.

Mr. MacEachen: I do not think there is any misunderstanding here. I did suggest to the hon. member that tomorrow I would be ready to call resolutions, and if that is the wish of the house I would be glad to do that. But if it is necessary and desirable to discuss the price of wheat, tomorrow I will call the estimates of the Department of Trade and Commerce, and on Thursday I would be happy to call the estimates of the Department of Labour so the problems raised yesterday could be discussed then.

Mr. Speaker: Before calling on the hon. member for Edmonton West (Mr. Lambert) who has risen, I might bring to the attention of hon. members that in view of the statement made by the minister I think the situation is resolved and I certainly would have no hesitation in making a ruling. But I see there is great anxiety on the part of the hon. member for Edmonton West to offer some advice to the Chair, and I shall listen to the hon. member.

Hon. Marcel Lambert (Edmonton West): Mr. Speaker, may I suggest that while there appears to be a patina of generosity on the offer of the government house leader, tomorrow there will be only an hour and a half to

deal with the whole situation regarding the international wheat agreement. That is the level of consideration that the government suggests be given to the matter.

Mr. McIlraith: We will sit tomorrow night.

Mr. Lambert: Tomorrow is a Wednesday. May I also point out, Mr. Speaker, that these offers to call estimates will mean dealing with these matters during opposition time, matters that should be dealt with by the government, because the time involved will count against the days left to the opposition for the consideration of estimates. Therefore in making these so-called generous offers the minister is giving the house nothing.

Mr. Speaker: I again bring to the attention of hon. members that in my view there is very little to be gained by continuing the debate at this time. I certainly do not wish to prevent hon. members who want to continue, but I remind the house that yesterday we spent 45 minutes debating whether we should have a debate, and we are engaging in the same type of debate today. If this is what hon. members want then I will recognize them. The hon. member for Rosthern.

Some hon. Members: The same old gang.

Mr. E. Nasserden (Rosthern): Mr. Speaker, it is quite interesting to hear the cat-calls from across the way today. On this occasion we have a legitimate complaint in regard to the order of business of the house so far as this particular matter is concerned. There is no more pressing problem to be brought before the parliament of Canada than the loss of sales and the loss in price that have been occasioned by the lack of consideration given this whole matter by the government, and the cavalier manner in which it has been dealt with.

The urgency of debate on this matter is emphasized by the fact that for the first time in six years the carryover of wheat and other grains in Canada has reached 590 million bushels. That is a six year high, and points up what has taken place during the last few years under the present administration.

There is another reason why we should adjourn the normal business of the house. It is one that bothers everyone from western Canada. During the last few days we have seen a member of the Social Credit party cross over to the government benches—

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.