

International Wheat Agreement

increasing costs, because while the farmer's general income is decreasing rather rapidly his costs of production are still increasing and he does not know where those costs will finish.

I realize that the great majority of prairie farmers certainly want the Canadian wheat board marketing system. I have been a continuous supporter of the Canadian wheat board—irrespective of what some of my friends may say. That board was brought into being by the Bennett government in 1935 and the only people who have tried to set it aside are those in the Liberal government. In fact, one of the orders in council which we discussed in the house pretty nearly took the meat out of that board in 1938 and made it non-effective. It is just getting back to operation now.

Despite the figures I have given of the very great cost to wheat producers, I am satisfied that 80 or 90 per cent of them still want an international wheat agreement of some sort. Along with many of those farmers I was very disappointed with the present international agreement; but, as I say, the vast majority of farmers want some sort of international wheat agreement to be arrived at, and I am satisfied that they want to continue with the Canadian wheat board. While I am not at all satisfied with the present agreement I do propose to go along in support of it and I hope it will work out considerably better than I presently foresee. I think it is a real gamble. The other day when we were on the minister's estimates I gave the figures of the wheat held by the people of this country. I think the statistics of the minister's department showed that we have on hand now some 604 million bushels of wheat. I believe that the average over the period 1943 to 1952 was 380 million bushels, so we have a considerable surplus now. We have on hand some 1,160 million bushels of wheat, oats, barley, flax and rye, and those figures indicate a very great surplus except perhaps in the case of flax. Farm producers at this time are very much concerned about their future and I am bound to agree that they have some reason to fear.

I am sorry that things are so indefinite when we are discussing this agreement, and, although the minister has not said anything himself, I had expected that before now he would have announced the initial payments for the crop year, that is on grain produced in 1953. Some days ago I asked the minister about the matter on the orders of the day and his answer was that unsettled conditions made it impossible to announce the price yet. To the extent that they were previously

announced, the producers have gauged their acreage and production to some extent based on these initial payments, but I am very sorry that the minister has found it impossible at this date, while people are seeding, to have made an announcement.

Mr. Howe: Do you know any people who are seeding?

Mr. Ross (Souris): According to announcements of the Manitoba department of agriculture there are a number who have seeded in the last few days. In fact, they started to seed during the week I was home at Easter but because of very bad weather their operations were held up. According to an announcement by the department of agriculture in Manitoba they are seeding today in southern Manitoba.

With those few remarks and criticisms I will close and say that I sincerely hope that this agreement will turn out somewhat better than we may anticipate at this time. It is a speculation and a gamble by the Minister of Agriculture and the Minister of Trade and Commerce, and such gambles have cost the people of the country a great deal of money in the past. I hope this agreement will turn out to be more satisfactory than it looks at the present time.

Mr. H. R. Argue (Assiniboia): Mr. Speaker, the members of this group are pleased to lend support to the passage of this resolution in the hope that when the agreement finally becomes effective it will include all countries and work to the satisfaction of producers and consumers during the next three years. We support the agreement not only because we feel that it has in it certain distinct advantages for the western producer but also because we believe in the principle of international commodity agreements. We would have liked to see the United Kingdom sign the agreement. We are extremely disappointed she has not seen fit to come into the agreement. We hope the United Kingdom may enter the agreement before the beginning of the new crop year. Under the agreement she has until July 15 to signify her intention of coming into it, and then if the international wheat council approves of her application she can be admitted before the beginning of the crop year.

I know that the coronation will see a great number of cabinet ministers in Britain. I hope that our cabinet, led by the Prime Minister (Mr. St. Laurent), will interview the British government to see if it is not possible, even at this late date, to persuade the United Kingdom to come into the agreement. If the United Kingdom came into the agree-