

*Grain*

This is absolutely false. That statement is not worthy of the Minister of Agriculture or any other minister.

I suggest that the greatest disservice that can be done to the Canadian Wheat Board is for ministers to continue to hide behind its skirts whenever they are trying to work their way out of a difficult spot. I want to make it quite clear that in our criticisms, as far as I and my colleagues are concerned, we are pointing at the government and nobody else. I think the Wheat Board is doing a good job. We have on that board competent, good men who are trying their best to do a job. They are fallible, of course; they make mistakes on occasion. We shall not fault them when they make an honest mistake, because this happens. Our criticisms are directed at the government because of its failure to take the action which has been recommended to it.

Second, Mr. Speaker, I should like to deal with the statements of the Minister of Agriculture and the Minister without Portfolio from Saskatoon-Humboldt (Mr. Lang). They suggested that the points raised by members of the opposition have been doing great damage to the grain industry. So far as I am concerned, the damage to the grain industry has already been done and is being done by the lack of adequate government action to deal with some of the problems facing western Canada. I feel we must keep before us at all times—and this point has been made by members on all sides of the house—that really the immediate crisis we face is only part of a larger problem. I refer to the general income problem, and the general cost price squeeze that faces the farmers of western Canada. I think it is important to keep this in mind.

● (12:30 a.m.)

I received a very interesting letter this week from one of my constituents. I would like to read it into the record because I think it is very pertinent and refers to something that should be kept in mind. This letter reads as follows:

I am at a loss to know why the Wheat Board opened the quota to three bushels per seeded acre before the unit was delivered, or at least to give a farmer a reasonable time to haul his unit. I am one out of quite a few who haven't been able to haul a bushel. I am a half section man so the 400 bushels mean as much to me as 1,500 does to the man with two or three sections. I harvested less than 900 bushels this last season of very poor grade which I might add is five or six damp or even feed.

[Mr. Burton.]

I don't think I need remind you of the position most farmers find themselves in. Someone is going to have an awful headache before this time year. Even so we do get a good crop the coming season that won't solve our problems.

Trusting you may be able to give me some sort of a solution to problem.

I suggested a number of things to this gentleman in answer to his letter, and I assured him that for my part I would do everything possible to help. But I must point out that in his letter this gentleman pointed out very forcibly and clearly that we have two items before us: One is the very immediate problem of deliveries, marketing and transportation which we have been discussing, and the other is the far larger one of income, the cost price squeeze and the rehabilitation which is needed in many areas of this country.

I would like to point out that the crisis that is before us is a national problem. It is something that affects many areas of the national economy, and unless we find adequate solutions it will jeopardize the welfare and the well being of many parts of the Canadian economy.

Over the past several months we have witnessed a series of recurring crises. The Minister Without Portfolio, the hon. member for Saskatoon-Humboldt (Mr. Lang), attempted to paint this situation in terms of opposition members panicking as problems arose. I would suggest that members of the opposition pointed out very validly some of the problems that were facing western Canada and, as was their duty, asked the government what they were going to do about them. From time to time we also put forward positive proposals to deal with these problems. For example, the hon. member for Regina Lake Centre (Mr. Benjamin) on December 5 put forward 12 different proposals for the consideration of the government. On one other occasion, on October 15, I put forward 8 different proposals for the consideration of the government. Other members of this house and members of my own party have also put forward proposals.

First of all, we had a difficult harvest. We do blame the government for quite a few things that have happened, but certainly no one would suggest that they were to blame for the difficult harvest situation that existed this fall. Then, we also had a slow marketing situation. I could go into this at some length because I think the government has to bear some responsibility, going back for a period of more than a year, with regard to the small marketings and the low level of exports that