

*Grain—Deficiency Payments*

did the hon. member for Assiniboia, of discussing wheat and other problems with the members of the farm union of western Canada. I would say, with respect to the brief to which the hon. friend has referred that I was astounded, dismayed and somewhat disgusted with the tone of that particular brief which implied although it did not state, that this government elected on March 31 had had no consideration for, and done nothing about, the wheat problem and other allied agricultural problems in western Canada. We have been here about two months. These 47 members—it should have been 48 incidentally—have been here two months, and had my hon. friends in the far corner of the house exercised that discretion and judgment which we may have expected from them we would have been able to tackle the wheat problem at least one month ago.

If we, as western representatives, if we as the spokesmen of western agriculture if you like, are to sit day after day, week after week, listening, as the Prime Minister (Mr. Diefenbaker) said yesterday, to repetitious speeches, if we are to listen to debates on matters of order and procedure, if we are to listen to amendments to motions and if we are to be delayed far into each night with the views of a small group of men who do not represent prairie agriculture, then we shall never come to grips with the problems of the western wheat producer. May I say in all humility, sir, it has been one of my studies over many years, and it is based on a world situation. Until the rise of Hitler in Germany and the rise of economic nationalism in Europe there was no wheat problem in western Canada.

It is quite true that we had problems of drought; we had problems in some years of slight over-production; we had problems of congested markets; but generally speaking, as compared to the last few years, we had no problem regarding the mounting surpluses that we have seen in recent years. This problem can never be solved by discussion in the House of Commons. It will never be solved by pitting political strength, however puny it may be, against the voice and thought of the government of this country. It will only be solved by serious and deliberate study of ways and means of alleviating a very difficult situation. The hon. member for Assiniboia referred to a probable mass movement on the city of Ottawa, the seat of this government, by the individual wheat producers of western Canada. We had such a movement as that in the 30's. By chance I happened to be in Ottawa as the servant of a farm organization in those years. The cry at that time was a dollar a bushel for No. 1 Northern.

That crusade was spectacular. I can still see the former prime minister, once removed, on a platform in a hall in this town receiving that delegation along with his minister of agriculture. I can remember farmer after farmer rising to plead the case of the western wheat grower. I can remember a priest making a very colourful appeal to the government to raise the price to one dollar per bushel. This appeal was successful. But I do say that in this year 1958 the situation is completely changed. We talk about the average cost of the production of wheat. I challenge my friends in the far corner of this house to produce such an average figure of the cost of production. Frankly, as a student of agriculture over many years, I know not what that average figure may be.

I do know that production methods today are much more efficient than they were ten years ago. I know, too, of course that taxes are higher; that labour costs are higher; that the cost of farm machinery is higher. However, I believe that the efficient grower of wheat is still assured, under this government's policy, having particularly in mind the payments—I refuse to use the term deficiency payments, because they sound like an orphan industry—that may be forthcoming from this government, coupled with market prices, of a fair margin of profit.

One would have to be a prophet to predict the future of western Canada in the next few years. It is quite apparent that we are moving into a period when wheat production as we have known it in the last 20 or 25 years may be a thing of the past. We have the possibility of the entry of the U.S.S.R. into the wheat market. We have bountiful production in the Argentine. We have a reasonable degree of self-sufficiency in Europe, and the promise of a further degree of self-sufficiency. It may be that our western wheat economy, as we have known it in the past, will have to undergo some drastic change.

I am not at all interested or helped by the veiled threat which I heard yesterday from a certain gentleman of the west, and which I heard again tonight from the hon. member for Assiniboia, that unless we put wheat production in western Canada on a profitable basis, unless we keep our acreages in western Canada in wheat, then we in the west will wreck the entire agricultural economy. I remember an old rancher friend of mine in the west who ran cattle on a large scale back in the 30's. We were talking about the over-production of cattle. We always talk about the over-production of agricultural products, regardless of what those products may be. I remember sitting with him in this city when we were meeting the government of that day. He sat in the office of the minister