

Grain

dry grain in the 30 degree to 40 degree below zero temperatures we have had on the prairies. To do what they could to help the Canadian Wheat Board embargoed shipments and thus sales of dry grain and devoted all shipping resources to shipping damp grain to terminals for drying. This policy has resulted in the worst tie-up of grain storage facilities in Canada's history.

• (11:30 p.m.)

It is beyond me, Mr. Speaker, why the minister did not take a leaf from the book of previous ministers who have been responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board and name a transportation controller or, if you like, special commissioner, whose word would be final and who would have jurisdiction over the railroads, the Wheat Board and everyone else, who could break up the log jam, co-ordinate the movement of box cars with supply and demand, and generally bring order out of chaos.

The Canadian grain industry has indeed sunk into a pitiful situation under the present government. We have lost sales to traditional customers and we have failed to make sales to new customers. We are not likely to make any new sales when the trade learns of our present predicament. Why, we are in such a mess that we could not even give our wheat away. Just before Christmas, on December 23, the newspapers carried a story of how a gift of 35,000 tons of Canadian wheat for two African countries was loaded on ships but held in Canada because the two countries said they had never asked for it and would not accept it. Do you call that planning? Do you call that co-ordination? The only things the government has been able to co-ordinate are high interest rates, high taxes, and now high demurrage charges.

The present mess is damaging and pathetic. It is another chapter in the gloomy story that has been unfolding over the past several years of Liberal government. But bad as the present situation is, I believe that sincere action by the government could remedy the situation to a certain degree. But such action may only bring temporary relief. It may not correct the basic weaknesses of our outmoded system which is forced to operate in changing times and a changing environment. I believe that the system has to be overhauled, and we on this side of the house have advocated changes in the production of grain, the sale of grain by the producer, in the marketing of our produce abroad and, above all else, changes to update our distribution system.

[Mr. Mazankowski.]

If we do not modernize our techniques, take a fresh look at conditions and make new appraisals of existing conditions, if we do not multiply and modernize our grain handling and distribution facilities, then all emergency measures that this debate may bring about will be fruitless. They will simply postpone the evil day when Canadian wheat ceases to be a major item of export and Canadian grain production a major support of our national economy.

During the last election campaign we heard a great deal about the great things that the government was going to do. There were to be sweeping changes, new concepts, new approaches, new initiatives, a reshaping of this and a reshaping of that. After the election the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) said that good government is rather dull at times and is not exciting.

One of the policies that the government brought forward concerned a national grains council. We have heard nothing of it lately. Surely such a body as a national grains council would prevent a situation of this nature. Mr. Speaker, I am afraid it is the same old story, words with no action, promises without fulfilment.

I believe we require an honest endeavour by those responsible to look at the whole changed picture of the world wheat market, at Canada's place in it, and that this long careful look must be followed by action which will put us back into global competition and retain the great grain industry as a major national asset. We need action to restore some life to our western economy which is so dependent on grain markets. We need to restore the cash flow and to relieve the heavy burden of debt that has resulted from the costs of producing, harvesting, storing and drying the overabundance of grain that is on hand. We cannot afford losses of sales like the recent one to Japan of some 17,000 tons estimated to be worth some \$10 million.

Whatever government action may come as a result of this debate, and I hope it is quick and effective, whatever may be done now to solve the immediate crisis can only be an emergency measure. Beyond that lies the absolute necessity for a basic re-assessment of and fundamental changes in our organization and policy. If this debate has done no more than pinpoint the need for future action it will have served its purpose well.

Hon. Otto E. Lang (Minister without Portfolio): Mr. Speaker, we are hearing again