

Business of Supply

In closing, I say it would be fine if farmers could deliver enough wheat now to immediately fill the Thunder Bay terminals. This would permit those who have grain piled outside to get it under cover. It would let us use the roads before they become completely clogged with snow or before the spring thaw makes them impassable. Most of all, it would get some badly needed cash into the hands of grain farmers. But one must balance these considerations against the need to make rational use of our transportation facilities, to maintain a steady movement to the west coast and to have our system geared and adjusted to the much expanded movement which will be required after navigation opens. We must consider, also, the fact that about 111,000 farmers have already obtained over \$250 million in cash advances since last August 1, some of this being taken out since January 1.

Perhaps there is good reasoning behind the minister's decision to have a steady but increasing flow of grain to Thunder Bay this winter, ensuring that the terminals will be at capacity well before navigation begins about April 10, instead of a crash program as suggested by opposition speakers, followed by weeks of stagnation.

An hon. Member: What is your quota?

Mr. Douglas (Assiniboia): Nothing. I agree that there are many serious problems in respect of our grain industry, but I do not believe the matter raised in the main motion before us is as vital as many other aspects the opposition might have selected for us to discuss today. For these reasons, and others, I cannot support the motion of the hon. member for Mackenzie (Mr. Korchinski) even though he is a fellow Saskatchewan grain farmer.

• (8:30 p.m.)

Mr. Yewchuk: Mr. Speaker, would the hon. member who just spoke inform the House why he felt it necessary to state publicly that he does not use stimulants or sedatives before speaking?

Mr. George Muir (Lisgar): Mr. Speaker, in spite of the minister's protestations this afternoon in regard to inefficiency in making use of available commercial storage, and in spite of the shocking and irresponsible statement he made that this motion was just another phony issue advanced by the opposition for political purposes, the very low quota situation prevailing on the prairies and the fact that there is a reported 70 million bushels of

unused storage in the terminals at the Lakehead, to be filled at leisure between now and the opening of navigation, are, to put it mildly, beyond comprehension. Even allowing for about 15 million bushels working space, the 55 million bushels needed to fill the remaining space would bring a welcome infusion of income to the cash-short farmers of Manitoba and Saskatchewan served by the Lakehead terminals. There is certainly no question of not being able to find selected grades, since a variety of grades were harvested in good condition in that area last fall, and the local elevators could supply almost limitless quantities of any variety.

Apart from cash advances, delivery to the elevator system is the only means grain-producing farmers have of turning their grain into income, unless of course they are willing to accept the lower prices offered by feed mills and by others in the feed supply business. Any withholding of grain storage space, with the farmers in a critical cash position, does not appear to be in their best interest. In fact, if this practice were to become commonplace, the request for payment on farm-stored grain would become even more valid because the Wheat Board is the sole grain handling agency. The minister speaks of the cost of this storage to the farmer as the main reason for the empty space, but this is of little comfort to the farmer who has to borrow money at extremely high rates of interest, and even less to the man who has used up all his credit and cannot borrow at any cost.

The low quotas which the farming community has experienced in the last two years—and there are indications that this condition will prevail at least for the foreseeable future—mean that the farmers will continue to bear the burden of storage facilities, grain deterioration, interest charges and other expenses connected with the proper care of the grain, without receiving any compensating financial benefit. Under these circumstances it is to be hoped that the government will seriously consider some form of compensation being made to farmers who provide proper storage on the farm.

Another problem that will loom large as spring approaches, and the Wheat Board has arrived at its final figures on the 1968-69 grain pool, is that it is doubtful there will be a final wheat payment out of the pool, regardless of what the hon. member for Assiniboia (Mr. Douglas) says, and this for the first time since the 1940-41 crop year.