

The Address—Mr. Johnston

Mr. Johnston: I do not want to.

Mr. Gardiner: The whole question the hon. member is now discussing was discussed before the board of the wheat pool. Everyone associated with the wheat pool knew the position. As a matter of fact every grain dealer in Canada knew it, and the fact that there were some members in the House of Commons who did not know it only indicates that they do not keep check on the records available to them.

Mr. Johnston: I am glad the minister said that, because I shall refer to the records in a moment or two, to prove what he says now is not the fact.

Mr. Gardiner: But you cannot prove it. The record shows \$65 million was available, and \$213 million had to be paid out. How could you pay that out without borrowing?

Mr. Johnston: I will show whether I can prove it or not. But, before turning to that, I wish to finish with this quotation. On February 27 the minister said to the hon. member for Melfort:

—and is he not aware of the fact that there could not be enough money to pay it without borrowing?

There is no misunderstanding about that statement made on February 27, when he said that there is no other way of making the payment except by borrowing. He has just repeated it today, so there can be no argument as to his meaning in that respect.

I wish to go back to the record as it appears in *Hansard* for February 27, 1948, page 1677, when the relevant discussion took place in the house. On that occasion the Minister of Trade and Commerce (Mr. Howe) was speaking in a debate on the Canadian Wheat Board Act, and had this to say regarding this 20-cent payment:

Instead, the government is taking power to increase the initial payment from time to time, whenever the cash position of the pool would appear to justify such action.

“Whenever the cash position would appear to justify such action”. No member in the house could doubt for one moment that the cash was right there to make the proposed distribution.

If there is any doubt about that—because the Minister of Agriculture may well say “I am not responsible for statements made by the Minister of Trade and Commerce”—

Mr. Gardiner: I will agree with that; nevertheless, it does not bear out your statement.

Mr. Johnston: Yes, it does. Then, let us turn to page 1719 of *Hansard* for February 27, 1948, at which time the Minister of Agriculture was speaking about the same thing. I intend to prove that every party in this house was of the same opinion that I am expressing

now, that the money was there to the credit of the wheat board. The Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Gardiner) had this to say, as reported on page 1719 of *Hansard* of February 27, 1948:

We would have to go to the bank and borrow money and pay interest on it, and the farmers of western Canada are not asking us at the present time to go to the bank and borrow money and charge the interest up to them and pay them another twenty cents over and above the possible twenty cents we may pay under this legislation. They are asking us to sell their wheat at the best returns we can get, to retain funds sufficient to carry on and make sure we shall be able to carry this through to the final conclusion.

There is no misunderstanding about that.

Mr. Gardiner: What is the date of that?

Mr. Johnston: February 27, 1948, just before you received the resolutions.

Mr. Gardiner: Before we received the further requests from the municipalities.

Mr. Johnston: The minister then went on to say:

Then they are asking us to amend the act so that as time goes on we shall be in a position to pay out any sums of money we may have to their credit.

That is not borrowed money.

Mr. Gardiner: That was my statement to this house and to the public, and even after that they sent in their resolutions and said that they wanted it paid.

Mr. Johnston: That view was not expressed in the resolution which the minister has placed on *Hansard*. As I recall it, they expressed the view that they wanted that payment made and certainly they had every right to expect that this money was there to their credit because the minister told them. Lest there be some mistake, let me quote again from that same page 1719, where the minister is reported as follows:

We should be in a position, Mr. Speaker, not only once a year but at any time throughout the year, if the operations up to date have given them sufficient cash—

How much clearer could it be that it was not borrowed money?

—with which to make payments to the farmers—whether it is in the summer, in the winter or any other time—to determine that they are in a position to make those payments.

The minister told us in unmistakable terms when this very payment was being discussed that there was the cash to the credit of the board. In case anyone might say that that was my understanding of it and that no one else in the house or in the country had such an understanding—