

Urgency of Debate on Wheat Prices

I agree with the leader of the New Democratic party about the urgency of debate in regard to this matter. A statement on motions would be totally inadequate. As the leader of the N.D.P. said, we would have statements by a spokesman from each of the parties and that, as you will appreciate Mr. Speaker, would not be a debate. That would be merely responses to a statement.

The Chair will have no trouble in making up its mind about the urgent public importance of this matter. There is no problem there. We know that in the last four or five years grain sales have been higher than at any previous time in the economic history of Canada. I submit that the question Mr. Speaker will have to consider as to urgency of debate is similar to that put to him yesterday, which also dealt with urgency of debate.

May I quote, as others did yesterday from Beauchesne, page 90, paragraph 3 of citation 100:

"Urgency" within this rule does not apply to the matter itself, but it means "urgency of debate", when the ordinary opportunities provided by the rules of the house do not permit the subject to be brought on early enough and public interest demands that discussion take place immediately.

This is a most important matter, which affects the economy not only of western Canada but of the whole country. We were led to believe—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. I have to interrupt the hon. member to remind him that we should not at this point discuss the urgency of the matter itself but rather the urgency of debate; why this subject should be debated today rather than, say, a week from now; why we should adjourn the business of the house to discuss this particular topic. This is really the point to which the hon. member should address his contribution at this time.

Mr. Woolliams: I appreciate your bringing that point to my attention, Mr. Speaker. I was coming to that very point. Until now I have dealt with none of the facts relating to this subject except as they illustrate the urgency of debate.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Woolliams: We had no opportunity to raise this matter earlier because the house has been closed for five or six weeks.

An hon. Member: Eleven weeks.

Mr. Woolliams: Eleven weeks. Looking at the list of business before the house it is clear [Mr. Woolliams.]

that we shall have no opportunity to discuss this most important subject in the near future. Why is this matter so urgent at this time? In order to emphasize the urgency of debate it is necessary for me to answer that question briefly. It is urgent because until May of this year an international wheat agreement was in effect. On May 16, 1967, we were led to believe that this agreement would be continued. My hon. friend from Humboldt-Melfort-Tisdale put a question to the minister at that time in reply to which the minister said that an international agreement was in force and would continue in force until 1968.

Since the house adjourned it has become apparent that there is no international agreement in operation at the present time. This is why the subject is so urgent; this is why it should be discussed today and not left until tomorrow. Moreover, it has now come to our attention that not only has the price of wheat dropped by 22 cents in the absence of a wheat agreement, but we are losing our markets for Canadian grain. The United States has moved into our export markets, as a result of which we have lost two thirds of our sales to one country alone, Japan.

These facts must be placed before parliament and an explanation given by the government. We are dealing with an industry which in itself makes one of the greatest contributions to our gross national product. It is urgent for that reason alone. There is a crisis in the agricultural industry and there is an economic crisis developing as far as the whole country is concerned because of the special position which wheat sales occupy.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Woolliams: Not only western Canada is affected; the industrial centres of eastern Canada are equally concerned, since this is something which involves the purchasing power of our people. I have never risen to speak on a more urgent matter since I have been a member of parliament, and I ask that the business of this house be adjourned so the whole question to which I have referred can be discussed fully, enabling explanations to be given of statements such as were made on May 15 when the minister gave the impression that the agreement would continue in operation. The agreement has now lapsed, and its absence will cost the farmers of western Canada more than \$300 million if the situation is not remedied.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.