

*Supply—Trade and Commerce*

they would have a surplus of wheat. Within 30 days there was such a demand for wheat that the Minister of Finance was telling the farmers that we had not enough wheat to meet the demand. What kind of nonsense is that?

People opposite scoffed at the former minister of agriculture. They said: You did not sell the wheat. They were so busy trying to sell this idea to western Canada that they forgot their responsibility as the government to sell wheat. The position of the hon. member for Qu'Appelle at that time was that we needed an aggressive sales policy. I am sure this minister wants an aggressive sales policy for wheat. But there is a difference between the two ministers. The minister of agriculture when we were in office said that if there was any problem we would take responsibility for that problem. The Minister of Finance said no, it is always the problem of the wheat board; there are no sales without the wheat board. That kind of attitude may have created the vacuum in which the government finds itself this afternoon.

I think it will pay if for a few moments I remind the house, before putting some questions to the minister, of some of the history of wheat. From the homesteading period until 1924 the sellers of grain in western Canada were disorganized. In the fall the price of wheat went down, and when the farmers had sold all their grain the price went up. Wheat was dealt with on the grain exchange. In 1924 our fathers and grandfathers met and formed the first wheat pool. From the first wheat pool there grew, through R. B. Bennett, the Canadian Wheat Board which for the first time in Canadian history stabilized the price of wheat in much the same manner as did the farm stabilization measure with respect to other products. That measure was introduced when the hon. member for Calgary North was minister of agriculture in the Conservative government.

The wheat board then became the marketing agency for all grain. This happened during the war, and I give the Liberals credit for it. The wheat board is the farmers' marketing agency; it organizes the sellers of wheat and is able to obtain a fair return, a pool price, for wheat. The farmers and producers of western Canada feel they have been put back in a vacuum in respect of wheat. In fact, they are in a vacuum. The only thing that the minister has done as the result of probings from the opposition has been to tell the farmers that to compensate them for the lower price he will give them a bonus. He has not

[Mr. Woolliams.]

explained certain things which have occurred, and I think we deserve an explanation.

• (4:20 p.m.)

Here are the questions that I should like answered, Mr. Chairman.

1. Has the United States or any other country broken the terms and conditions of the international wheat agreement? Is that agreement operating on a legal or moral basis?

I see that the minister is getting some guidance from the new Liberal member for Medicine Hat, who never really wanted to sell wheat to the Communist countries anyhow.

2. With the lapse of the international wheat agreement after the meeting of the nations at Geneva, was there a moral undertaking by all exporting and importing countries of grain who were a party to the agreement to live up to the terms until a new agreement became effective?

Why is that question important, Mr. Chairman? It is important for this reason. If the United States continues to sell its grain below the minimum price stated in the international wheat agreement, which is not now in operation, then we are going to lose our markets. What country is going to pay more for wheat from Canada if it can get it cheaper from the United States? Is this a reprisal by the United States against Canada because the former Conservative government dared sell wheat to Russia and Communist China? Has the minister put that question to the United States? We want to know what has been the nature of the talks.

3. Did the minister know on May 15, 1967 when he announced the prices in the House of Commons and the increase of 22½ cents for No. 1 Northern that there was no minimum or maximum price that could be legally enforced, and that basically the farmers of western Canada were operating in a vacuum for the first time in many years?

If the farmers were operating in a vacuum, and if wheat was operating in a vacuum as far as its being a market commodity, why did the minister say that we have a new minimum and a new maximum even in spite of that vacuum? We are almost back on the old grain exchange system where the United States can make moral arrangements with Canada and then go out and dump its wheat on to our markets.

That is the kind of stand that I should have liked to see the minister take on that night in