

proposed increase in the price of bread? If so, has he satisfied himself that the four cent increase in the price of a loaf of bread announced by the Bakery Council of Canada cannot be justified? If so, what immediate steps does he propose to take?

Hon. Herb Gray (Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs): Mr. Speaker, I have received the interim report which was issued by the board to the public. I will be anxiously awaiting the results of the work it now has under way so that the government as a whole can take decisions in this matter, the program being one that is administered, of course, by the Wheat Board.

Mr. McGrath: Has the minister satisfied himself, and if not, why not, that this four cent increase in the price of bread cannot be justified?

Mr. Gray: Mr. Speaker, I think we should take a serious view of any major increase in the retail price of bread at this time. We would want to assure ourselves that any increase implemented by the industry was fully justified on the basis of increased costs and did not come from an increase in the price of flour which was supposed to have been stabilized by the subsidy program administered by the Wheat Board.

Mr. McGrath: In view of the failure of the government's flour stabilization or subsidization program to have the desired effect and in view of the skyrocketing cost of sugar, which is a further contributing factor, what immediate steps does the government propose to take to prevent further increases in this staple foodstuff?

Mr. Gray: Mr. Speaker, I am glad the hon. member recognizes that this program has helped to prevent increases in the price of bread which would have otherwise taken place. As I said in answer to other questions and as was committed in the Speech from the Throne, we are certainly prepared to carry out our responsibilities where and when necessary.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. A number of hon. members have supplementaries. Perhaps for the moment the Chair might recognize the right hon. member for Prince Albert and return to supplementaries on this subject later.

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GRAIN

PROVISION OF BOXCARS TO TRANSPORT WHEAT

Right Hon. J. G. Diefenbaker (Prince Albert): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the minister reporting for the Canadian Wheat Board. Farmers all over western Canada are being pressed to deliver their wheat so that the Wheat Board can carry out its responsibilities under international agreements and the like. However, cars are not available. Figures I received for last week, and I ask whether they are correct, indicate that the number of railway cars is 7,800 behind the target of the Wheat Board for west coast delivery and 4,811 cars below the target for delivery to Thunder Bay.

Oral Questions

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. Perhaps the right hon. gentleman might now like to ask the question.

Mr. Diefenbaker: Mr. Speaker, I find that sometimes the government has not looked into these things and I have to give them information.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

● (1430)

Mr. Diefenbaker: I ask what is being done to secure the necessary cars. The farmers are being urged on the one hand to deliver grain but there is no place to deliver it.

Hon. Otto E. Lang (Minister of Justice): Mr. Speaker, farmers are being asked to deliver wherever there is a possibility of their doing so. There is, of course, significantly more space in the elevator system as a whole in the prairie region at this time this year compared with the same time last year. There are real difficulties facing individual farmers in areas where snowfall has been heavier than normal. This has no doubt led to problems of farm delivery in some cases. We are asking every participating section of the industry, the railways, the elevator companies and the farmers, to do their utmost to ensure the maximum amount of grain movement. Either the failure of the grain to come in or failure to move it forward can become an impediment to Wheat Board sales.

Mr. Diefenbaker: No snow job like that can cover up the government's failure. Let that be clear. Despite all the explanations the minister has endeavoured to place before the House I ask him, what is he doing to ensure a supply of cars? I suggested to him before—he brushed it aside but again I press it—that a boxcar controller be given authority by parliament—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. Perhaps the minister might be given an opportunity to reply to the right hon. member's supplementary question.

Mr. Diefenbaker: I had not finished my question, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: That is precisely what I was afraid of.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Speaker: I did not wish to interrupt the right hon. gentleman but I was hoping he would soon reach the point where he would ask a question so that the minister might be given an opportunity to answer and we might be able to proceed.

Mr. Diefenbaker: I am trying to get an answer from the minister: I know he needs protection against questions. I ask him whether he will now give consideration to bringing before the House a measure giving power to a freight car controller to direct the railway companies to make cars available to this important sector of the economy and providing for prosecution and stern penalties in the event of failure to comply?

Mr. Lang: We are indeed prepared to consider every step necessary to ensure that the railways carry out their responsibilities effectively rather than simply making up