

Supply—Finance

Mr. Sharp: Mr. Chairman, I should be glad to start with the Canadian Wheat Board as I know there is going to be discussion of this subject. I am quite happy to take part in that discussion and I have no objection to dealing with the Canadian Wheat Board at this time. If that is what we are going to do I should first like to make a brief statement.

The Chairman: Order, please. Does the committee agree that we should now discuss the wheat board?

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

Mr. Olson: Mr. Chairman, on a point of order, will it be necessary to call an item in the estimates of the Department of Trade and Commerce in order that this subject can properly be discussed?

Mr. Sharp: Mr. Chairman, the items relating to the Canadian Wheat Board which now come under my jurisdiction are statutory items. They are not callable in the ordinary sense but are subject to statutory approval. It was in an effort to help the committee in dealing with the estimates of the Department of Finance as such and the estimates of the Canadian Wheat Board later that I made my first suggestion. I have no objection to whichever way the committee wants to handle the matter but if we are going to deal with the Canadian Wheat Board under the first item, which is a possible way of dealing with it, I want to make a short statement.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Grégoire: Mr. Chairman, I believe it would be more sensible for us to start with the finance estimates since they are the estimates under discussion. Later, I will have no objection to coming back to the Canadian Wheat Board estimates. I believe we should start with the estimates of the finance department.

[*English*]

Mr. Diefenbaker: Mr. Chairman, we are trying to expedite things and the minister has shown a very great willingness to have this question discussed under item No. 1. If other members want to discuss other subjects under item No. 1 there is no reason they cannot do so. I can see no objection to the procedure suggested. We are trying to co-operate in bringing about a reasonably early examination which will not be unnecessarily lengthened. For that reason I think there must be general agreement that the wheat board can be discussed under item No. 1.

[*The Chairman.*]

The Chairman: Does the committee now agree that the wheat board can be discussed under item No. 1?

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

Mr. Sharp: Mr. Chairman, I should like to deal in this brief statement with the question of procedure raised the other day when I followed what I considered to be sound parliamentary practice in attempting on motions to table the order in council in which the government approved the final payment by the wheat board, and the press release made by the Canadian Wheat Board that day. Members of the opposition in remarks made outside the house accused me of arrogance, cowardice and some other attributes that I am a little too modest to recall at this time. May I be permitted to plead not guilty and to explain why I followed the procedure I did.

I followed this procedure for what I consider to be excellent reasons and reasons which I believe should appeal to the house. Since taking responsibility for the Canadian Wheat Board in 1963 I have been very much concerned about establishing the respective responsibilities of the Canadian Wheat Board under the Canadian Wheat Board Act and the responsibilities of the minister who answers for the wheat board in this house.

Hon. members will perhaps recall that when I took over responsibility for the Canadian Wheat Board I made a very significant change in the method of dealing with that board. Originally there had been a tendency, particularly under the previous administration, on the part of the minister which caused a good deal of confusion as to his responsibilities and the responsibilities of the Canadian Wheat Board. I was not here to listen to the statements but it is very difficult in reading what was said by the minister who was responsible at that time to determine whether he was boasting about the achievements of the Canadian Wheat Board or taking credit for them.

When I took office I decided I was going to attempt, if I could, to clarify this relationship in the minds of the farmers, members of parliament and the public at large. The form of the first announcement I made in this house relating to the wheat board was very different from any announcement made previously by any minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board, and I went back through the records to see what the practice had been. In the first statement I made, and I have adhered to this form every since, I said that the Canadian Wheat Board was that day