

Grain

The Canadian Wheat Board is the minister's responsibility, and I suspect that the Wheat Board must accept a good portion of the blame for the present situation. How much more falls upon the responsible minister when the wrong grades are in the wrong place at the wrong time, as the hon. member for Vancouver East (Mr. Winch) stated. I submit, Mr. Speaker, this is not an act of God. While the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Olson) has no direct say in these matters, it is still reasonable that we should expect him as an agricultural leader and as a farmer to take a close interest in anything that works to the detriment of his own area of responsibility. In my opinion the inaction the ineptitude and the lack of knowledge of the Minister of Trade and Commerce have worked to the detriment of our western wheat producers.

When I spoke about foresight and the lack of it, I had reference to the fact that the problems of fulfilling commitments for dry grain and handling vast amounts of damp and tough grain, the result of last year's inclement weather and terrible harvesting season, must have been apparent to the experienced officials of the Canadian Wheat Board. They must have experienced this situation some months ago. Not only that, the government of this country was cross-examined many times by members of this house, and the answers we received were ludicrous.

We were referred to as "publicity seekers". One headline read: "Opposition Publicity Seekers Hurt Wheat Sales, Says Olson". We were accused of damaging our foreign markets. We were not publicity seekers. We were seriously concerned about government inaction and offered our suggestions and solutions and alternatives, watching the serious situation unfold before our very eyes. We suggested the government give assistance by making available large grain dryers, by making advance payments for grain drying, or by some form of acreage payment assistance. The Minister of Agriculture replied by saying, as reported at page 3569 of *Hansard*:

—hon. members opposite are seeking publicity and it is my right to express my opinion also.

The fact that you, Mr. Speaker, saw fit to allow this emergency debate indicates the seriousness of the situation. I suggest that publicity had no effect whatever on your decision.

More than any other body in this country the Wheat Board knows how much wheat of any grade in a certain condition must be shipped from where to whom at specified

times. Furthermore, it must know existing contractual commitments to foreign buyers who become more fickle and illusive every day in the existing grain market. Knowing these obligations, how can the government have planned so badly as to fill grain storage facilities with damp grain instead of with dry and marketable grain? How could the minister responsible be so casual about such a grave question and leave detailed planning to others without taking any interest in what was happening? The government had a responsibility in this general area.

As other hon. members have said, about 30 ships are waiting to be loaded in Vancouver harbour. At the same time dry grain, some of it three years old, sits on the prairies and cannot be sold because it cannot be moved. The empty ships are costing our prairie farmers about \$2,500 a day each in demurrage costs.

What can one say about the Canadian wheat producer? First he was hit last summer by a strike of grain handlers at Lakehead elevators, and the government took no action until wheat shipments had been delayed to the maximum possible extent, storage facilities clogged, box cars piled up, and our customers frustrated. Next, our wheat producers were hit by dreadful weather conditions during the harvesting season that left them with a diminished crop that was damp, tough and unsaleable. They also had a formidable carryover of unsold grain from previous years.

Then the Wheat Board and the Ministers of Agriculture and Industry, Trade and Commerce said that the individual farmer was responsible for drying his own grain. Most farmers had no drying equipment and to buy it would cost money. With sales dwindling and poor quality crops our producers were faced with the dilemma of whether to invest money in dryers or await a breakthrough in the marketing of damp and tough grain. To make matters worse, western farmers were short of cash. Credit was tight. Firms drying grain commercially required guaranteed payments from farmers which farmers could not meet. Yet throughout this period, even though the government had ample time to act and ample warning of what lay ahead it did nothing to help our farmers in their extraordinary difficulties.

When government inaction and indifference were finally overcome and when the government offered to help farmers in drying their damp grain, it was too late. You just cannot