

War Appropriation—Agriculture

Mr. CARDIFF: But the ceiling was established just prior to the time the freight assistance was given to us, was it not?

Mr. PERLEY: What was the date of the freight assistance?

Mr. GARDINER: There has been freight assistance on this basis since October, 1941, and that was the same time as the price ceiling was set.

Mr. CARDIFF: That is what I said.

Mr. GARDINER: They were set at the same time; all set about the same date.

Mr. SENN: I think the hon. member for Melfort asked the minister a question which he has not yet answered. I understand that when I was out of my place for a minute the minister took me to task about my statement in regard to Providence giving us a bountiful harvest. Nobody knows better than I do that our spring grain crop last year in Ontario was more or less of a failure, but that does not alter the general situation.

The point, however, which I wish to put to the minister at the moment, and I think it was mentioned by the hon. member for Melfort, is that, as the minister has already stated, different prices are charged in different parts of Ontario to farmers who are buying mill feeds which come from the west, in the shape of grain. I have heard criticisms on the part of the farmers, many of whom are not able to finance the bringing down of a carload of grain for themselves. The grain is bought by milling companies or other small companies which manufacture it into feed, and different prices are charged. Is there any supervision on the part of his department to see that the farmers are not charged two or three prices illegally or wrongfully by different companies, some of whom would make a greater profit than others? It seems to me that when a milling company gets freight assistance in this way it should be fair at least to the man who has to feed the grain.

Mr. GARDINER: My information is—of course I am not now in a position to follow it through—that the ceiling price on mill feeds in Ontario is established on a level throughout the province. There is a mark-up which is allowed by the prices board under certain conditions. I am not able to give the details with regard to them, but the ceiling price that was established has been maintained, as I understand it, all the way through.

Mr. SENN: My information is that different prices are charged, and it seems to me that somebody, either the wartime prices and trade board, or the Department of Agriculture,

[Mr. Gardiner.]

which is supplying the freight assistance, should see to it that the farmers all over the province get an even deal.

Mr. WRIGHT: The minister did not answer my question with regard to whether there were three or four dealers handling this feed between the time it arrived in the east and was finally sold to the producer. I have been told that last year, during the shortages of feed in the east, certain firms had control over large quantities of grain in eastern Canada; that deficiencies occurred in areas where these firms did not have outlets; that as a result grain had to be transferred, sometimes as many as two or three times, before it reached the consumer, and that each one of the people who handled it got a commission on it. I do not see any reason for the existence of that condition, and I wish the minister would give us some information on the subject.

Mr. GARDINER: I understand that there have been cases where there have been shortages. As a matter of fact, when I was in Paris, Ontario, some time this spring a gentleman came to me and told me that he had had difficulties for a week or so in getting grain, because the regulation was that they had to take it from the lake front and they were not able to get it from the lake front, and there was a supply at Toronto. As soon as they made their application to the board and got the matter dealt with, there was a shipment made from Toronto into that area, and that involved some additional freight. I am informed by the representative of that board here that the freight was paid by the board and that it did not cost the farmer any more than it would have cost him had it been shipped from the lake port. In other words, the ceiling price was maintained on the grain just as though it had come from where it was first ordered to come from, but where it could not be obtained because the supply was not there.

Mr. WRIGHT: In other words, the extra commissions are paid by the government rather than the producer. But I still do not see why the cost should come out of the pockets of the public, or why there should not be a better distribution to avoid this expense.

Mr. PERLEY: Will the minister state why there is over 100 per cent increase in this item? Will he also state whether the \$8 million voted last year was fully expended, or was it overexpended? Also, who is the administrator, and what staff does he have to administer this vote of \$16,500,000?