

The Budget—Mr. Weselak

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Is the house ready for the question?

Some hon. Members: Yes.

Mr. A. B. Weselak (Springfield): Mr. Speaker, this being the first occasion on which I rise to address the house since becoming a member, I would like to follow the custom of the house by congratulating you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and also Mr. Speaker. I must say that I have listened attentively to your rulings and have found them to be fair and just, and therefore I am pleased on this occasion to associate myself with other hon. members in this respect.

This afternoon, I listened with considerable interest to the speech made by the hon. member for Assiniboia (Mr. Argue). For forty minutes I heard a tirade such as I have never heard before. Throughout his speech the hon. member criticized the actions and policies of the government; forecast a depression, stated that we had lost all our markets, and that blue ruin was prevalent in the west. While it must be admitted that there is no room for overoptimism, neither is there licence for presenting a dismal and frightening picture to the public, particularly to those who are not normally familiar with the facts.

The hon. member for Assiniboia belittled every effort made by the government to move western surpluses, ignoring the fact that unusually large crops have produced record surpluses, while at the same time farmers in western Canada have marketed greater quantities of grain than ever before, and export sales have reached new peaks. His speech, while critical, certainly was not constructive, and contributed nothing toward a solution of the farmers' problems. When asked how he proposed financing a substantial gift of grain to southeast Asia his only reply was that we should tax corporations or, in the alternative, reduce defence expenditure by \$500 million.

While I hold no brief for corporations, there is a limit to which taxes can be levied on corporations. Capital investment is essential to the development of this country and its progress, and eventually a saturation point is reached when the tax has the adverse effect of restricting investment of such capital. Offhand I am not in a position to say whether this point has been reached, but I do not believe the reply given was seriously considered by the hon. member before it was made. His alternative, namely to reduce our defence expenditure, also suggests a certain measure of lightness, and no doubt would be welcomed by any potential enemies of this country.

[Mr. Cameron (Nanaimo).]

Reverting to my remarks regarding wheat, I wish to go on record as being in support of our wheat board system of marketing. I feel that the government, through the wheat board, has done a tremendous job in disposing of the unusually large crops which have produced record surpluses.

During the debate yesterday, the hon. member for Inverness-Richmond (Mr. MacEachen) pointed out that the unemployment figures today should be viewed bearing in mind the labour force and the total number presently employed. He pointed out that unless these factors were taken into consideration the unemployment figures were not being placed in their proper perspective.

As regards our wheat surplus, consideration should also be given to the fact that whereas our normal wheat crop is 325 million bushels per year, in the past three years the prairie production of wheat has reached anything from 529 to 664 million bushels. A total of 1,855 million bushels of wheat have been harvested in the past three years, compared with an average pre-war harvest of approximately 936 million bushels over a similar period, and which means in effect that the production has been practically doubled.

Our normal exports would have been adequate to absorb the pre-war production, but they have not been sufficient to keep pace with the production for the past three years. The record shows that in 1950 producer marketings were 367,845,000 bushels which was high for the period 1944 to 1950. In 1951 our producer marketings were 455,341,000 bushels. In 1952 our producer marketings were 535,942,000 bushels, and in the period August 1 to March 3 inclusive our 1953 marketings were 263,200,000 bushels for a period of seven months.

An analysis of these figures indicates that had we been producing average crops then we would not have had sufficient grain to fill the markets which we have had in the past three years. An examination of any of the records of the wheat board and board of grain commissioners will indicate that our exports exceeded 500 million bushels last year and our consumption last year, including grain for milling purposes, exceeded a total of 200 million bushels making a total in excess of 700 million bushels disposed of in the past year.

The wheat board is faced with a serious problem, but I have every confidence that if markets are to be obtained every effort will be made by the government to obtain these markets. We must admit that the marketing of these huge stocks of grain presently on hand presents a serious problem, and while