

Movement of Grain

farmers of western Canada at a time of particular need, we see little hope of the suggestions of the task force being carried out, especially having regard to the low payment on barley.

Mr. John Burton (Regina East): The low level of return on the 1967-68 crop will be extremely disappointing to the farmers of western Canada, though I might say it will not be entirely a surprise to them as they saw the crisis which was looming on the farm front before the government did.

The returns being provided at the present time and the level of prices are not nearly adequate to meet the needs of the agricultural economy. I think it ought to be emphasized once again that western Canada and the agricultural economy of that region face a crisis and that this crisis is bound to effect the national economy. Farm prices have been falling over the last two years while farm costs continue to rise. During the past year the index of farm costs has risen by some 5 per cent.

We can also expect that the wheat payment will be low. This I feel is the result of the abdication of responsibility by the federal government particularly during the period between the expiration of the international wheat agreement and the commencement of the new international grains arrangement—it was during this period that the grain crisis developed to the full extent which we are witnessing today.

The downward trend of grain prices is continuing into this year. The level of Winnipeg cash prices for oats presently ranges around 86 cents a bushel compared with an average of 92 cents a year ago. Prices for No. 2 C.W.-6 row Barley are in the area of \$1.07 compared with \$1.25 a year ago. This indicates that the situation is getting worse, yet we have seen little or nothing in the way of government action to deal with these problems.

In addition to the price factor, the farmers of western Canada have this year been faced with extremely difficult problems involving damp and tough grain. On many occasions my colleagues and other members of this house have endeavoured to bring the full impact of this crisis to the realization of the government, but the government has been slow in taking action and in developing initiatives. The farmers of western Canada are extremely disappointed by the ineffectiveness of government action over the past several months.

[Mr. Horner.]

The full impact of the crisis with respect to damp and tough grain will become more clearly known in the course of the next few weeks and will be entirely in line with the predictions made by the western agricultural organizations and by the farmers on the scene. Thus I urge the government, before it is too late, to take measures to deal with this crisis which is affecting all of Canada.

[Translation]

Mr. C.-A. Gauthier (Roberval): Mr. Speaker, we of the Ralliement Cr ditiste want to rejoice with the western farmers and congratulate the members of that wonderful organization, the Canadian Wheat Board, because, as was said by the minister, the money does not come from the country or the government but solely from the Canadian Wheat Board which has accumulated it to make a last payment to the farmers.

Those who like me have had the privilege to read about the very difficult start experienced by the board, can rejoice today over its achievements. In fact, we notice that the western farmers are wise to support at all costs their co-operative because I have always considered the Canadian Wheat Board to be just that, and we can see today how profitable the work of this board has been for the western farmers.

Mr. Speaker, several hon. members seem to wonder why the Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce (Mr. Pepin) is the spokesman for the board in this house? I think that I have found the answer and I want to pass it on to the house because several new members seem a little intrigued. We know that government money is not involved but rather the efforts of the Canadian Wheat Board to assist the farmers. I do not think that I am mistaken and if my memory serves me well, the former Minister of Trade and Commerce (Mr. Winters) used to be in the past co-chairman or honorary chairman of the Canadian Wheat Board. I think it is a title which the Canadian Wheat Board has bestowed upon the Minister of Trade and Commerce and I should like to know whether the present minister is an honorary chairman of that board. I trust he is, because when making such statements in the house he seems to talk on behalf of the Canadian Wheat Board and I have the impression that the western farmers are happy to have him as an honorary chairman in view of the significance of that position.

Mr. Speaker, we are not jealous of the Westerners, but we, also, would like to be