

Canada Grain Act

● (3:30 p.m.)

Mr. Speaker, the Board of Grain Commissioners for years have had control of life and death over the grain companies. They set the tariffs which the companies may charge. They decide their gross income. If the Board of Grain Commissioners wanted to work a hardship on the grain companies, all it had to do was cut off their money. The same thing exactly would apply under this bill. This is the essence of it, and no government is going to permit any commission to put the grain handling industry of Canada in jeopardy, because the grain handling industry is absolutely essential to the Canadian farmer. Hopefully, no government would set up an act or give a commission power to confer favouritism on the grain handling trade. This is the heart of the issue.

Under this new bill, if passed, we would permit mixing at terminal elevators. Mr. Speaker, as an individual I have always been unalterably opposed to mixing at the terminal. But this bill would permit mixing with permission of the commission and we have to accept it because of changing conditions. Anyone who is close to the grain trade knows that we have been stuck at the west coast with high grades of grain which we could not mix but which buyers were not prepared to purchase because it had the No. 1 label on it, because it was not high-protein wheat and was not necessarily the package they wanted to take to their home countries. These are the realities we have to face; these are the facts of life. This is what the farmer out in western Canada wants. He wants all members who represent him in this Parliament to be concerned about this matter. He wants Members of Parliament to be concerned, to move his product and allow him to hold his place in the competitive markets of the world.

One of the reasons we have lost sales in the quality markets is that we did not move sooner to do what this bill proposes to do. Anyone who is closely connected with the trade knew this, not only in 1970 and 1969 but in 1968 and 1967. That is why we had professional and well-informed people from the Board of Grain Commissioners and in the appropriate department of government working out a bill clause by clause, a bill that would be bring us into the 1970s and not leave us sitting back in the 1950s.

I cannot understand members of this House who have dillied and dallied, who have spent endless hours nit-picking in committee and

who now sit here while this bill dies on the Order Paper. Certainly, the charge could be made that the government should have referred the bill to the Standing Committee sooner than it did. That is a charge that the government will have to meet, if it is levelled against it. But be that as it may, we are now in this place and we are faced with making a decision. It will help nothing to look back and say this person or that person should have done something else.

This new bill will license elevators; it will license agents; it will control rates; it will control tariffs; it will change the grading system. But, Mr. Speaker, the old act controlled rates, it controlled tariffs, it licensed elevator agents and it licensed off-track storage. It permitted or did not permit off-track storage. A dealer had to be licensed if he was to handle grain and deal in it. This new bill does not change that situation.

Let me read part of a press release sent out by the Palliser Wheat Growers' Association. These people appeared before our committee and said that certain amendments were needed. But this is what they said on October 2:

Mr. Nelson said the Palliser association understood some amendments "which we feel are essential" received support before parliament's summer recess and the legislation should not now be held up. He called on Mr. Olson to take "positive action" to have the government give the legislation priority before the House prorogues and the act dies on the Order Paper.

This is not an old organization. It claims to have 8,000 members who were enrolled within a couple of years in what is called the Palliser triangle in western Canada, the wheat country. I know its members dug into their pockets and put up the money for membership. If we had time we could talk to the National Farmers' Union and the Federation of Agriculture, two major organizations. If any member wanted to call them on the telephone right now, I know they would say, "Yes, we want the bill passed. We want it put into effect." If this is the case, who is saying no?

An hon. Member: Horner.

Mr. Gleave: I suggest, Mr. Speaker, that the trade is saying no.

Mr. Benjamin: And their mouthpieces in here.

Mr. Horner: Ask Mr. McNamara.