

favour of making a payment even when there is no crop, and in favour of diversification instead of encouraging wheat, all point in the same direction.

The results of a questionnaire on the payments, sent to 171,625 holders of Canadian Wheat Board permit books, was quite conclusive. To date, 36.6 per cent of the producers have returned completed questionnaires. Some 87.1 per cent favoured payments on an acreage basis; 1.3 per cent favoured part of the payment on acreage and part on a bushel basis; 10.3 per cent favoured all of the money being paid on a bushel basis through the Canadian Wheat Board wheat pools, and 1.3 per cent returned the questionnaire with no choice indicated. This certainly indicates how western grain producers preferred to receive the payments from two-price wheat funds.

In conclusion, it should be made clear that the government took its responsibility for deciding that the money available for payment should continue to come from the treasury, even though a significant proportion of it now is clearly a consumer subsidy, holding the price of bread down instead of letting it reflect world prices for wheat. On the other hand, the \$3 price for wheat is still higher than the world price and therefore producers as a group have no complaint, as they strongly indicated in their replies to the questionnaire.

It is difficult to follow the argument of the hon. member that wheat producers lost \$30 million on the basis of what millers are paying, and the international price. Last year we paid over \$57 million to grain producers in western Canada, on an acreage basis. At least 80 per cent of all grain producers in western Canada produce wheat; therefore, on this basis wheat producers received \$45.6 million out of the \$57 million paid out.

GRAIN—WHEAT—DISPARITY BETWEEN COST OF HOPPER CARS PURCHASED BY GOVERNMENT AND THOSE BOUGHT BY UNITED STATES RAILWAY

Mr. Jack Murta (Lisgar): Mr. Speaker, I should like to take a few minutes to stress my concern about a question I asked some time ago and in a letter I wrote to the minister responsible for the Wheat Board (Mr. Lang) last August. At that time I questioned the minister about the purchase of hopper cars for the movement of Canadian grain. I criticized the minister because I felt that the amount of money paid by the government for the hopper cars was abnormally high. The minister replied in writing and said there was fair bidding, etc., on the contract. I am not criticizing the purchase of the hopper cars, because I think it is a generally accepted fact, at least in western Canada, that this was a step in the right direction. But I am criticizing the terms of the purchase. I believe this is not only important to westerners but to all Canadians.

The thing that spurred my question was that the Burlington Northern Railway in the United States had also purchased hopper cars for the movement of grain. They bought 1,000 jumbo hopper cars for \$18 million. From my information, they were 100-ton cars with a capacity of 3,300 bushels each and will be in service by this summer. These cars are virtually of the same size and capacity as those purchased by the Canadian government. I believe the difference is that the federal government has overpaid

Adjournment Debate

the companies who built the cars by some \$12 million. This is the discrepancy between the Canadian and the United States figures.

My purpose tonight is to ask the minister responsible for the Wheat Board if he will outline what the excess covered. I have some questions that should be answered in connection with the sale of these hopper cars. First, has there been a final agreement between the government and the railways as to the exclusive use of the cars? Second, what arrangement has been reached for the maintenance and repair of the cars? Who is going to pay for that—the federal government or the railways? Third, what is the rate structure for reimbursement by the railways for use of the cars?

Since half of the lines in western Canada will not be able to carry these cars because of their size, I think the Canadian people, especially western grain farmers, should know how the grain is going to get to the main line so that the hopper cars can be used. Are the railways going to buy the cars from the government, or is the government to continue ownership? The minister has defended his action by saying the difference is made up in part by federal sales tax and transportation to western Canada. The grain trade sources that I have been in touch with say that any companies doing business with the federal government are exempt from federal sales tax. That would be taking money from one pocket and putting it in another.

These are some of my concerns, Mr. Speaker. To my way of thinking, \$12 million is a considerable discrepancy. When I asked the question in the House, the minister responsible for the Wheat Board said it looked as if there were some additional ball-bearings or some other small parts in the make-up of the cars, and this constituted some of the difference in price. I do not think that answer is good enough.

• (2210)

The minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board has always been very secretive and has not imparted information to the Canadian people. I hope that tonight we will hear some details about the contract and exactly why there is this differential in price with respect to cars to be used in Canada and those that are used in the United States, so that this matter may be cleared up and the Canadian taxpayer may know exactly where and how this money is being spent.

Mr. J.-Roland Comtois (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, the minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board (Mr. Lang) had indicated to the hon. member for Lisgar (Mr. Murta) that there is a good deal of room for difference in the engineering and make-up of the hopper cars involved.

The Burlington Northern, the United States railway involved, purchased 1,000 hopper cars at a cost of \$18,000 per car. This \$18,000 should be compared with the net price of the Canadian car of \$20,100 after federal sales tax and consulting and inspecting services are subtracted. However, the Canadian cars had a number of additional features not incorporated into the U.S. equipment. These added-cost Canadian features will result in long-term