

Wheat—Marketing of Surplus

Given a reasonably good crop this year we shall be confronted with a situation which will tax the confidence and the faith in the future of many people who have been engaged in this great part of our national activity, whether it be on the farm or in the various organizations which serve to carry the grain from the farm to the ultimate consumer.

The present situation is one over which the government has had complete supervision. In so far as it can be affected in any measure by government action, the present situation is the result of the decisions and the action of this government. Let there be no pretence that the wheat board acts without consultation with the government in reaching its decisions. At any rate, when things were going well we were told that it was the beneficent conduct of this government that had produced the good results; we were told that too often for the matter to be left in a position where any Canadian has any right to do anything else than to place fully upon this government the responsibility for meeting the situation which now exists.

One of the great problems confronting the farmers of western Canada and all farmers whose prices are affected by what happens to the price of western grain, as well as other Canadians who in one way or another are affected by this situation, is that we find ourselves between two diametrically opposed policies. The responsibility for resolving that situation is that of the government. Over and over again we have been told by this government that it does not believe there should be any intervention in trade and commerce. They have acted upon that principle in certain fields of activity. In others they do not uphold that principle. Which principle does guide the government in forming its policies? Surely it is time that the farmer, the shipper, the railways, the ship owners and all our people generally knew. Everyone in the house has supported the principle inherent in the farm prices support act. Everyone in the house recognizes the fact that, no matter what proportion of our production it may be in dollar value, agriculture is still the basic production in this country.

It must be a matter of concern to every Canadian to see our farmers in the uncertain and distressed position in which they find themselves at this time. The position is precarious. The position is one which must be faced in some way. It is a situation which can only be faced by the government. With that power of numbers which has been proclaimed on so many occasions, and once again by the Minister of Justice (Mr. Garson)

this afternoon, it is not within the power of any member of the opposition to change the course of events by the decisions we might make. All too rarely is there any evidence that it is within our power to guide the course of events by arguments, no matter how sound they may be.

This is a situation that calls for action. It is a situation that calls for action by those who have the power. It is a situation that calls for action by those who have assumed so completely up to this time the responsibility for handling this matter. One of the things which makes the situation so precarious and which makes it so necessary that there be a definition of policy is the enormous surplus of wheat and other foods in the United States. Large though our total may be, and very large though it may be in proportion to the rest of our production, it is still comparatively small side by side with that of the United States.

There is this difference also that must be borne in mind. Under the procedure they follow the farmer is guaranteed a payment for his wheat. At the present time he is guaranteed a payment of \$2.21 a bushel. The government is the owner of this great surplus. The government is in a position to trade with it in foreign markets. Realizing that this is a commodity they have bought and that they own, with their enormous annual income they are in a position to do things which would have a very profound effect upon our economy. I do not question the good will, the good intentions and particularly the attitude of the government and the people of the United States. Nevertheless, over the objections of the government of Canada they made this reduction and we were bound to follow. There are some differences in our better types of wheat, but substantially we are dealing with the same commodity in the markets of the world.

We cannot disregard the effect of such decisions as they make with regard to the marketing of that commodity. Our position is very different. Our farmers own the wheat. Our farmers bear the direct impact of any reduction of this kind. Our farmers will suffer directly as the result of anything that may happen which carries still further the liquidating process now under way in the United States. Can there be any assurance that what was done a few days ago means the last step in liquidating this surplus? If there is not, then let us face with reality, frankness and candour the effect that this will have upon our farmers and upon our whole economy.