

Grain

Mr. Skoberg: With great respect I suggest that what I said with regard to these courses was relevant inasmuch as these courses were partly responsible for the lack of co-ordination which gave rise to the situation we are discussing. I believe every member of the house is sincerely interested in co-operating with the government to the fullest extent, provided the government, in turn, is prepared to reciprocate. It is farcical for the minister to suggest that we were opposed to the Canadian Wheat Board, as he must know. Not one member has ever criticized the Wheat Board as such, and we believe the Wheat Board should be given the fullest support in its endeavours. But in order to do its job properly, the board must have the support of the ministers with whom it works, and I suggest it does not have this backing.

As to sales, I am sure that if there had been unexpected sales the government would have used the occasion to make headlines across the nation. The only sale they did announce—and the announcement was made with a great fanfare—turned out to be a continuation of an arrangement already made. I am sure we would have heard about it by now if there were really big new sales in the offing.

I cannot agree that the action of the opposition has had anything to do with sales overseas at any time. The markets are there for the getting, and if we make a concerted effort and co-ordinate all the departments involved, I can assure the minister sales will be forthcoming. At present there are too many departments which are reluctant to interfere with each other. If they would get together, something could be done.

Mr. Don Mazankowski (Vegreville): In rising to participate in this debate I shall probably not be as colourful or as carefree or as charismatic as the Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce (Mr. Pepin), nor do I wish to be, nor shall I try to be. I feel the subject before us is of utmost seriousness.

I welcome, as do all hon. members, particularly those from the prairies, the announcement by the minister that some 3½ million bushels of No. 2 northern wheat are being moved from the terminal at Moose Jaw. I would say this is another victory for the opposition, thank to the hon. member for Mackenzie (Mr. Korchinski). I am sure he can be considered as a very good friend of the western Canadian farmer.

[Mr. Lambert (Edmonton West).]

From the remarks made by the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Olson), one might conclude that the present prairie grain situation is bright. It would appear it has improved vastly in the past eight hours. Seriously, there can be no doubt that Canada's grain industry is in serious difficulty, despite what the Minister of Trade and Commerce and the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Olson) have said.

Indeed, the situation is such as to constitute a grave national emergency. A production, distribution and marketing system that was once a model for others and constituted the backbone of this country's economic well-being is today paralysed and impotent. Ships waiting to load Canadian wheat for foreign buyers lie idle on the Pacific coast. Railway arteries are clogged with the wrong grain in the wrong place and at the wrong time. Farmers on the prairies are sunk in debt under huge piles of dry grain that cannot be moved and damp grain that cannot be exported.

• (11:20 p.m.)

What has happened to this system that in happier days sold and shipped countless millions of bushels of grain without serious interruption and to the satisfaction of producer and customer? I believe that the basic cause of today's disaster lies in the refusal of a series of Liberal governments to undertake the basic overhaul of grain production, marketing and distribution methods which has been urged not only by members on this side of the house but by others who are knowledgeable experts in this field.

The immediate causes of the situation that could kill new wheat sales and jeopardize renewal of contracts with our traditional buyers are, I believe, the lack of foresight by responsible officials, the absence of government concern, government inaction over the past few critical months and, last but not least, lack of concern on the part of the Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce (Mr. Pepin). If since assuming office last summer the minister had spent some time acquainting himself first hand with the responsibility he has in regard to Canada's grain producers, who last summer were overburdened with record surpluses of grain, rather than touring South America on a ministerial junket and appearing on television, he might have come to realize the important role that our grain industry plays in this very important export trade. Perhaps then he might have realized that he had been rewarded with a very challenging and interesting job.