

Grain

further problems and requires more sophisticated machinery to handle the grain at the ports.

Investigations in recent years of the grain handling situation show that we are sadly lacking in many areas to fulfil all the demands of our customers and to take care of unexpected sales that fortune has thrown our way. We must hurry to modernize our grain handling facilities so that we can cope with the unexpected.

This last fall we had a modestly good crop, severely damaged by rain and frost over wide areas of the prairies. In fairness, it seems to me that much of the congestion can be attributed to the large amounts of damp or wet grain in store and awaiting drying at Vancouver. Such harvesting seasons will recur at intervals and we will have to be prepared for them at least once every 20 years, if not once every ten years, so that we can carry on a major drying operation. The need for this will likely increase as farms increase in size and mechanization.

It seems to me only reasonable that provision should be made by the government, either in conjunction with local elevators on farms or with elevators at the coastal terminals, for a large amount of grain to be reconditioned for sale in the world markets. A chain is only as strong as its weakest link, and when handling facilities at a port such as Vancouver become clogged and break down, only chaos can result.

It is particularly disastrous to note, according to an item in the James Richardson and Sons weekly grain report, that a 17,000 ton sale of grain to Japan may have been lost and its place taken by a cargo of Australian wheat. It is very damaging that Japan, one of our traditional markets, and a country that does not fall under communist domination—leaving aside political consideration in our dealings with the communist bloc—is one country where unfortunately we have lost a sale.

It is well known that the erratic shipments of grain from the west coast have been a factor in the loss of our traditional Japanese barley market. In the past year we have seen this market slip away to France and Australia. This loss has been in part due to uncertainty of delivery out of our west coast port.

Canadian agriculture is facing severe circumstances in penetrating the markets of the world, and competition will be fierce. There

[Mr. Ritchie.]

are many facets of this problem that we cannot control but it is wise to rectify those things that we have the power to rectify. Certainly, one of our immediate tasks is to put the port at Vancouver into the best possible position for exporting grain.

● (9:30 p.m.)

There are upwards of 300 million bushels of damp grain in farm storage. Many experts feel this grain will be seriously damaged if it is not conditioned by spring. So, in addition to the amount that has been expended by the farmer in harvesting the grain there will be a considerable loss in value. From a long range point of view it might well be considered that we should have facilities for the storage of grain outside this country in places such as Tokyo and Rotterdam. These are our main market areas. This would allow for a cushion in the event of delayed shipments of grain by reason of abnormal conditions such as strikes and other unforeseen problems.

I strongly urge the government to take the present tie-up at Vancouver as an indication of the seriousness of the situation in respect of the grain trade and particularly the handling facilities for grain in western Canada. I ask that the government act with all possible speed in this matter. I should like to ask the Minister of Trade and Commerce whether international markets have been lost because of any delay in getting the right type of grain in position; what can now be done to get the required types of grain to the terminals and, finally, a question which the minister did not touch on, will the prairie farmers have to pay for the mounting demurrage costs in respect of the boats?

Mr. A. B. Douglas (Assiniboia): Mr. Speaker, in rising to take part in this debate I should like to register my concern about the problem of trying to be prepared for every eventuality in the business of marketing grain. It is a very serious thing to be unable to deliver grain in the quantities and grades, and at the time our customers require it. It is especially serious when after a year of poor sales our markets are showing some signs of buoyancy again, and we have added to a substantial carry-over from last year another better than average size crop. I note in passing that overseas clearances of wheat and wheat flour are running about 25 per cent or 30 per cent higher so far in this crop year than they were a year ago.