

Canada Grain Bill

he is faced with accumulated debts of cash advances and all the other sources of credit that have been made available. In order to recover his financial position, he will require an extended period of time with the maximum price for his grain.

There have been rumours to the effect that there has been a miscalculation in the demand for barley, so much so that it has been placed under export embargo. As it has been euphemistically explained, it is not an embargo on exports but, rather, a refusal on the part of the Wheat Board to receive any further export orders for barley. This is another way of saying precisely the same thing. I mention these matters at this stage of the discussion merely to point out that what we are grappling with in Bill C-175 will have a tremendous impact on the continuing progress and future health of the grain industry in Canada. This industry is fundamental to the prosperity of the Canadian Prairies.

The fear so often expressed at the various public meetings to which I have referred was this. There is a strong suspicion that behind this bill, as well as some of the other initiatives in agricultural legislation that have been put forward by the government in recent months, the government is attempting to deal indirectly rather than directly with the continuing problem of railway line abandonment on the Prairies. The question of railway line abandonment or continuation is intimately bound up in the whole situation of the grain trade on the Prairies, involving the transportation facilities, the collection of the grain and the eventual transfer to export positions. We know that there has been only a temporary freeze on railway line abandonment for a certain period of time.

Some of the implications of the legislation are that there will be a rationalization of elevator facilities. What the government has in mind in some of its amendments is very closely related to the whole problem of railway line abandonment. This in turn relates to the process that has been going on not only in western Canada but in all rural parts of Canada. There has been a gradual diminution of the role of the rural community with the decline of the rural population. The population shift from the rural to the urban community goes on apace. In recent months much concern has been expressed because of the implications of this continuing shift of population from rural to urban communities.

The major problem area in Canadian society today is in our large complex urban communities—the booming, buzzing confusion of urban life. In this regard the government has not done anything to discourage the trend. Indeed, it has gone along with the trend, particularly with reference to the closing of post offices, our fundamental means of communication. Over the past two years in particular we have seen the ruthless, wholesale closure of rural post offices. In many instances this has meant the failure of community stores in small towns. When the country store goes, that is the end of that rural community as such. Since the Minister without Portfolio (Mr. Coté) who is responsible for the Post Office has assumed this responsibility, there has been a change of government policy in this regard. He has declared there will no further elimination of rural post offices until the whole

[Mr. Dinsdale.]

matter can be reviewed. I suggest that the same thesis applies with respect to further rationalization of country elevators.

Anyone who has experience of the Prairies knows that the dominant characteristic of rural communities on the Prairies is the two or three grain elevators that stand starkly on the horizon. They are fundamental to the economic life of rural areas of the Prairies. They are also a very integral part of the whole problem of the decline of rural communities, with the consequent upsurge of urbanization and all the social and economic problems that arise therefrom. There is no need to belabour the point further. These considerations will have to be borne in mind when the legislative proposals are reviewed in committee.

• (8:40 p.m.)

Already some 20 amendments have been accepted by the government. These amendments could not have been made, of course, had the official opposition not stuck to its guns and delayed the passage of this legislation. A further 40 amendments or so not yet taken into consideration in connection with the new bill before the House have already come forward and, no doubt, as we hear from spokesmen from various sectors of the grain industry others will be set down for consideration. Eventually, we hope, after 40 years we shall come up with a new or completely rewritten Canada Grain Act which will be adequate to deal with the contemporary problems of the grain industry.

Mr. Gordon Ritchie (Dauphin): Mr. Speaker, in rising to speak in this debate may I say I am well aware that this is the second time around for a bill which is essentially similar to Bill C-196, on which a great deal of effort was spent in order to bring about changes to the Canada Grain Act. It now appears that a great many valuable improvements are to be expected.

It is 40 years since the Canada Grain Act was substantially amended. In my opinion, the bringing forward of that measure was a task which had to be undertaken and a great deal of effort was required to arrive at reasonable legislation. Ostensibly, the enactment of Bill C-175 is considered urgent as a means of bringing protein grading to Canadian wheat. It has been said we are losing sales because protein grading in specific percentages is required by some importing nations in order to satisfy new milling and baking practices. No doubt this position is accepted by all, but it is interesting to note that we have succeeded in increasing our sales of grain this year to a number of overseas countries—for the most part, perhaps, to the less developed countries where the subject of protein grading is not of such importance and where price is a more dominant factor.

I have in mind markets such as Red China, to which the sale of some 90 million bushels amounted to slightly more than exports in the previous highest year, but at a price considerably below the minimum set under the International Grains Arrangement. The farmers' position is further worsened by the rise in value of the Canadian