

THIRD READING

Hon. Mr. ROBERTSON moved the third reading of the bill.

The motion was agreed to, and the bill was read the third time, and passed.

INTERNATIONAL WHEAT AGREEMENT
MOTION FOR APPROVAL

The Senate resumed from yesterday the adjourned debate on the motion of Hon. Mr. Robertson:

That it is expedient that Parliament do approve the International Wheat Agreement opened for signature at Washington on March 6, 1948, and that the Senate do approve the same.

Hon. J. P. HOWDEN: Honourable senators, since the house adjourned yesterday afternoon I have gone over this wheat agreement and also have endeavoured to refresh my memory about matters connected with the grain trade; but after due consideration I concluded that I was not in a position to throw much light on the agreement and that therefore it would be folly for me to burden the house with lengthy remarks. I find myself in substantial agreement with the leader of the government (Hon. Mr. Robertson) and the leader of the opposition (Hon. Mr. Haig), who differed only in that one favoured the agreement altogether, whereas the other was not so favourably inclined towards it.

Honourable senators, it is purely and simply an agreement; it is not a contract. I might say it is a gentlemen's agreement. Based on the principle of "better half a loaf than no bread", I am inclined to support the agreement. The countries which are prepared to produce and sell wheat have agreed with the buying countries to supply 500 million bushels at stipulated prices and under certain conditions.

One should compare the present conditions respecting the wheat trade with those of the thirties, when the farmers burnt their grain for fuel and Canada had accumulated 500 or 600 million bushels of unsaleable wheat. Surely it is better to enter into an amicable arrangement with these countries who are prepared to buy our wheat than to return to the conditions of the thirties. At that time the people overseas were starving for wheat and were blaming the shortage on economic nationalism. I think that certain elements in the Canadian grain trade were to some extent blameworthy for those conditions.

It was commonly rumoured on the streets of the city from which I come—so frequently referred to by the honourable leader opposite—that certain persons engaged in the wheat

trade had put their heads together with some American operators and agreed to corner the wheat market and control the price. We all know the resentment that engendered on the part of the nations across the sea. We also know that England plowed up her vacant land for the purpose of securing her own food supply, and that Italy utilized her vineyards for the growing of wheat. I think that if the proposed arrangement is not entirely satisfactory to those engaged in the wheat trade, they themselves are to some extent to blame.

The proposed agreement is the result of the best efforts of many eminent individuals who are trying to avoid a recurrence of the conditions which prevailed in the thirties. Even before the thirties the grain trade was not good. Surely such an agreement is to our advantage and worth while.

Hon. R. B. HORNER: Honourable senators, I have only a few words to add to the debate. I come from Saskatchewan, which produces more wheat than any other province in Canada, and for the past forty years I myself have been struggling to grow wheat.

I have always been amazed at the strong interest of people who do not grow wheat in handling it or giving it away. I should like to ask the leader of the government whether over the past few years the lake shippers, the railways and the brokers have made a sacrifice comparable to that of the wheat farmers. I remember the time when Swedish bottoms carried wheat from Fort William to Liverpool for five cents a bushel. The rate on the lakes is now about ten cents a bushel, and apparently that is not enough.

The question of the transportation of grain is of considerable interest to me. Honourable senators who are not familiar with distances in the West should take note that all agreements are based on price at Fort William. The producers in my province, whether their product is shipped to Vancouver or Fort William, pay more freight than anyone else. We are about half way between the two points. Due to the difference in freight alone, a shipper from Winnipeg would get at least ten cents a bushel more than I would get.

This agreement only indicates an intention to do something. As the previous speaker said, it is not a contract. Because of the difficulty of producing wheat from year to year it may well be necessary to vary the price. While I am not arguing against stabilizing the price for the western farmer, I am not entirely satisfied with the prices that are put forward in the agreement.

The honourable senator from St. Boniface (Hon. Mr. Howden) spoke about the bad conditions of the thirties. Those conditions were