

*Business of Supply*

by the head of the grain handlers union, by officials of the grain companies and by railway people. The reason the grain is not being handled in this manner is that it is more convenient for the railway companies to supply a larger number of cars later on.

• (5:10 p.m.)

I, for one, am not one bit interested in the convenience of the railways. I plead with the minister, because it is an emergency, to adopt the idea of filling this space quickly, thus providing space at shipping points which are eligible to ship to the Lakehead. This, in turn, would provide space at country elevators for the two bushel quota, thereby enabling the farmers to deliver the grain sooner than they would otherwise be able to do. When one looks at the performance of the railways, in spite of their protests and the assurance of the minister that everything is carefully planned, it smacks of sheer incompetence and indifference. A look at the DBS weekly report of car loadings shows that in the period August 1 to December 21 last, a period of about 20 weeks, 21,109 fewer cars of grain were loaded than in the same period in the year 1968. That was a slow and rough year. In this crop year 21,000 fewer cars were loaded. Compared to the year 1967, 29,000 fewer cars were loaded in the same period.

The minister assured the head of the grain handlers union at the Lakehead on Monday, January 17 that 3,000 to 4,000 car loads would arrive at the Lakehead. The information I have is that between 1,500 and 2,000 cars arrived during the week ending January 17, half the number the minister said would arrive. The Saskatchewan Wheat Pool states it could now handle, on a five-day week working three shifts a day, 400 cars a day and that they received during the eight working days between January 2 and January 13 an average of 71 cars per day. They are not even getting the 100 cars a day they had expected. The total number of cars under load was something over 4,000 fewer on January 14 this year than on January 14 a year ago. There were some 12,000 cars in transit and under load on January 14 a year ago and 8,400 on January 14 this year. There were 726 cars under load and in transit to the Lakehead on January 15 and that was an accumulation of two days of loading.

The whole thing has not been properly co-ordinated. This is the effect of an improper plan of the minister and his officials to gradually fill the Lakehead storage by the opening of the navigation season somewhere around

[Mr. Benjamin.]

April 10 or April 15. In the meantime, the farmers must wait seven weeks longer than necessary in order to get another one or two bushel quota to the shipping points which are permitted to move grain to the Lakehead. The railways may claim a shortage of equipment. This may not be an important matter, but I understand there are something in the order of at least 1,000 potash cars sitting idle. These are more easily and more quickly loaded and are more easily and quickly unloaded. Now, when there is a shortage, these cars are sitting around idle. It is true they must be cleaned in order to prevent corrosion, but there is no excuse for their not being used when they are sitting idle.

I ask the minister to review his program because this is an emergency situation. I agreed earlier that when conditions are normal what is being done now and what has been done before can be understood, but this is not a normal situation. It is in fact an emergency which affects not only the farmers of the prairie provinces. When one goes into the communities, talks to the small businessmen and employees and sees what is and has been happening in the last few months, and when one goes downtown in Regina and finds several business places vacant, one finds evidence of the situation which exists. When one finds people employed by farm implement plants and others who should be handling grain laid off, surely the minister will agree there is an emergency situation and that he should take extraordinary measures to fill the space in a record time. It can be done. The equipment and the men are available to do it. The space is available in which to put the grain. I hope the minister will agree that some other measure must be taken rather than the one he is taking at the moment.

The amendment to the motion calling for a guaranteed price for the farmers also calls for the appointment of a transport controller, who I submit should have complete authority and control over all aspects of grain movement between Vancouver and Thunder Bay. When we tried this system before it worked reasonably well, although there was room for improvement. This must be done again. Because of the confusion in respect of authority, and because of the great number of agencies involved, the problem is too difficult to be handled properly in the present way. So I hope the minister will do more than just appoint a co-ordinator for the terminals at Vancouver and the Lakehead. I expect he will appoint a terminal co-ordinator at the Lakehead, but I suggest over and above that, what