

*Canadian Wheat Board Act*

I should remind the hon. member for Meadow Lake (Mr. Cadieu) that in 1921, the year after the wheat board was abolished in the first place and the futures market reinstated in this country, the average price of grain went down by some 85 cents per bushel, a drop of 34 per cent over the previous year. That is the history, and we should learn from it.

On the open market the farmer is subject to the ups and downs of things he cannot control. He cannot control the climate that affects the crops in his own country or around the world, but there is one thing he can protect himself against and that is the speculators and grain traders in his own country. He can protect himself against those who gamble with the rapeseed, the flax, the rye and the other things in the open market, like dice in a casino in Las Vegas.

Why do we not market all grains through the Canadian Wheat Board in a collective sense in this country so that all farmers could reap the benefits of any windfall gains there may be and share in any losses there may be, so that there is no middle man, no speculator or grain trader making a few million dollars from the sweat on the brow of the farmer? I think all the profit from grain in this country should go back to the farmer and back to the companies that he owns, such as the wheat pools, and not to the private grains exchange. That is not free enterprise, Mr. Speaker. I think if all grains were marketed through the Wheat Board that would be real freedom.

We have heard Conservatives in this debate say, "What the NDP is talking about is taking away your freedom. Here is a voluntary pool. That is real freedom for farmers." But there are parts of that pool that are not real freedom for the farmer—he can opt into the pool but he cannot opt out. If the Conservative party were really concerned about freedom they would want to amend this bill so that the farmer could opt in or could opt out. That would be consistent. As it is, once he opts in he cannot opt out—he is stuck there for better or worse. The history of pools in this country has shown it to be for worse.

Several little pools may be set up, none with real bargaining power, and many set up by private companies—maybe Cargill is one of them—that are not interested in returning the profits to the farmer but are interested in using the profits for their own ends. Many of them are set up with that objective. There may also be people who are bootlegging outside those pools, and that is a difficult thing to control when there are small pools with some people in and some people out and it is not known who is in and who is out. It is a very complicated system, Mr. Speaker.

As the hon. member for Regina-Lake Centre pointed out last night, we should stick with one side or the other. We should either be free enterprisers and do everything through the open market, or come to our senses and do everything through the grains board by expanding the Canadian Wheat Board. I am sure the majority of people in my riding would like to see it done that way. I know that a plebiscite was held four years ago and the result was a decision to market rapeseed through the Canadian Wheat Board. At that time 54

[Mr. Nystrom.]

per cent of the people voted to do this and 46 per cent voted against it. I think attitudes have changed since that time, although I know even then the people in my constituency voted overwhelmingly to market their product through the Canadian Wheat Board. I am here to represent their interest and, in my opinion, that is the best way to market grain in this country so that the profits and risks are shared by all the people involved.

Yesterday I spoke about the rapid fluctuation in the price of rapeseed in Canada over the last few years. It has gone up and down by dozens of cents per bushel from one week to the other, or one month to the other. That is because of speculation on the futures market. If rapeseed came under a grains board as wheat does, there would not be that constant fluctuation in price; there would be stability. In March or February there would be stability in pricing. The farmer would not have to be concerned about when to sell his product because the price would be relatively the same throughout the year. On the open market, however, he may get a dollar per bushel more for rapeseed in March than in October.

That is the problem my grandfather used to speak about when he was producing wheat. Before the Wheat Board was established he would take his grain to the elevator in the fall and the speculators, the grain exchange and the Richardson security people in Winnipeg, all knew there would be a great influx of wheat. So in the old free enterprise economy when there was an over-supply the price would drop, and my grandfather and his friends would get just a few cents per bushel for the wheat they hauled to the elevator by horse and wagon in the fall.

The wagons were lined up to the country elevator, with one farmer competing against the other. That was rich competition; they got 20 or 30 cents per bushel—the free enterprise system at its so-called best. It was the speculator who made the killing in those days, buying grain at a low price and selling it high later in the year. After the small farmers like my grandfather had sold their grain in the fall in order to buy clothes for their children and pay taxes, they would not have any grain to sell in the wintertime or in the spring. But the large operator would have grain for sale at three or four times the price going in the fall. And the speculator would have grain to sell and make a windfall, but not the ordinary farmer.

Now, Mr. Speaker, thanks to sanity, we have the Canadian Wheat Board which has thrown that old so-called pure free enterprise idea out the window, thank goodness. In the fall when the small farmer takes his crop to the elevator he gets the same price as if he sold it in March. There are no speculators there, with dirty hands and sticky fingers, taking money from the farmers. The small farmer has been getting initial payments for his grain and then, at the end of the crop year, his final payment. That final payment is really the difference between what he got in the beginning and what it was sold for by the Canadian Wheat Board. It represents the profit or surplus which, but for the Canadian Wheat Board, would never be his.