

CANADIAN WHEAT BOARD BILL.

FIRST READING.

Bill 206, an Act respecting the Canadian Wheat Board.—Hon. Sir James Lougheed.

SECOND READING.

Hon. Sir JAMES LOUGHEED moved the second reading of the Bill.

Hon. Mr. BOSTOCK: Is my honourable friend going to explain this Bill at all?

Hon. Sir JAMES LOUGHEED: Shortly, it is this. The Government proposes asking Parliament for authority to continue the control of the Wheat Board in the event of conditions warranting their intervention. I will not say that the legislation in the United States is precisely similar to this; but they have a measure of legislation by which they can exercise control of the wheat crop under certain conditions. There are conditions likewise in Europe by which the Allied Powers may exercise, and as I understand are exercising, control over wheat and flour in the Allied countries. There are also conditions of a very disturbing character which may render it necessary for the Government of Canada, as well as the Government of the United States, practically to repeat what they have done on this subject during the last couple of years. It is difficult to say whether those conditions will reach such an acute stage as to warrant governmental action, but it is desirable to have this authority given the Government and placed upon the statute book, so that in the event of our being warranted to exercise that power which the Government now asks we would have it. It will be in the public interest that this be done. I may say that the Bill will be upon our files when we return this evening.

Hon. W. B. ROSS: I would like the leader of the Government to be able to inform us then whether, in the United States, apart from the war legislation, there is any legislation in force giving that Government the right to control the wheat of the country. I understand that there was a bill there that had that effect, but that ceased some time early this month, and what is left is the War Act. There must be some one here in the Department of Foreign Affairs who can give us information on that, because I think it is a relevant point in the consideration of this Bill.

Hon. Sir JAMES LOUGHEED: I understand that wheat has been decontrolled in the United States: but under their War Measures legislation they have still the right

to regulate, and that practically is our situation in Canada. The present intention is not to control, but to take authority to intervene if it is desirable. I notice that the Minister of Trade and Commerce, who had charge of this Bill in another place, intimated that he was hopeful that it may not be necessary. It will be purely a matter of the Government exercising its discretion upon the conditions that may arise.

Hon. Mr. BOSTOCK: This Bill has been introduced by the Government in the dying hours of the Session, and we have not had an opportunity of seeing and studying the measure. It does seem to me that this legislation is somewhat extraordinary for the Government to be introducing at the present time.

Hon. Sir JAMES LOUGHEED: Not more extraordinary than we have been passing for the last couple of sessions.

Hon. Mr. BOSTOCK: I know, but that legislation was brought in as a result of the war.

Hon. Sir JAMES LOUGHEED: So is this.

Hon. Mr. BOSTOCK: We had hoped that we were getting through that condition, and that it would not be necessary in the future to go on passing this kind of legislation. From the remarks made by the honourable leader of the Government just now, it might seem that all the Government is asking at the present time is an enabling power to deal with this matter; but it may have a very serious effect on the business of the country. People will not know under what conditions this power is going to be exercised. If the Bill goes through there will be power in the hands of the Government to act or not as they think fit; but the people engaged in the business will not know whether this is going to be put into force or not. I have not had time or opportunity to read the Bill and therefore I may not fully appreciate all the sections of the Bill; but I do think it is a very serious matter to ask us to deal with legislation of this kind in the last hours of the Session, when we are very near prorogation. We have had the same kind of thing to complain of in the past, and I do not think that what has happened previously gives us any confidence in dealing with measures in this way. If my honourable friend will recollect, the Bill dealing with the formation of the Board of Commerce was introduced into the House in this way, in the last hours