

Government Wheat Policy

ramifications of the situation, it should be dealt with forthwith. There is urgency, and the urgency lies in the failure for six months to ratify the international wheat agreement, allowing the United States, deliberately and by agreement, an open door to markets which traditionally belong to Canada. As a result of these failures some 700 million bushels of wheat piled up on the prairies—not an unusual situation under Liberal governments. As far as the western farmer is concerned, Liberal years are lean years.

● (3:00 p.m.)

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Muir (Lisgar): Reference has been made to the agriculture estimates. I say bring them on; let us see what solution the government proposes to a calamity of its own making.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. I have to remind the hon. member that he is now making the speech which I assume he would normally make if the motion were accepted. He should attempt to limit his remarks to procedural considerations having to do with the urgency of debate.

Mr. Muir (Lisgar): I was just laying the groundwork for the procedural argument.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Muir (Lisgar): It is true the chairman of the wheat board will be appearing before the committee on agriculture. It is certain that when he appears he will repeat the outline of potential calamity which he dealt with yesterday. This does not solve the situation. Let us not fall into the error which the government is trying to foster, that a committee is a substitute for parliament. A committee is not a substitute for this house. It is true that in committee information can be elicited from the officials, but that is not what is needed at the present time. What is needed now, and needed immediately, is a statement by the government indicating awareness of the catastrophic situation into which the western farmer has been plunged by its lack of policy; and what is required is an undertaking by the government that there will be action. Such an undertaking can only be given in parliament. The situation can only be met by an immediate undertaking on the part of the government that something will be done, at least to double farm drying facilities. This cannot be given in a committee.

[Mr. Muir (Lisgar).]

Mr. Speaker: Order. I have to remind the hon. member once again that according to my limited understanding of this type of question he is at this point considering the substance of the situation and it seems to me, as an independent observer, that hon. members really defeat the purpose of this kind of motion when they fail to limit their contributions to the debate to the procedural aspects. If a number of hon. members take part in this debate by putting forward their substantive arguments, it is then much easier for the Chair to take the position that the matter has already been debated and that the motion for adjournment should not be allowed.

With this in mind, I ask hon. members to limit their contributions to the procedural aspects.

Mr. Muir (Lisgar): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is because of the limited knowledge of this subject by members of the government that I felt they should be enlightened.

The farmers must have an assurance that the government will act to provide drying facilities on the farms. This is the first thing that should be done. Such facilities can cost a great deal of money. Should a farmer be asked to pay thousands of dollars out of his own pocket to make up for government negligence? Precious few farmers in western Canada have this kind of money at the moment to play around with. Unless we act immediately, millions of bushels of grain will rot in piles in the fields of western Canada.

That constitutes the urgency of the matter. Only government action can help the situation and prevent a very serious economic loss to the prairies and to the country as a whole. To be useful, such action must be forthcoming at once, or at least there must be an indication that it will be forthcoming at once. Unless an opportunity is granted to us now to deal with this subject and impress on the government the urgency of the situation there may be no other opportunity, once the time allotted to the estimates has elapsed.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. John Burton (Regina East): In dealing with the question of urgency of debate, Your Honour will be aware that there have been numerous references to this subject on the orders of the day and on other occasions during the current session. I suggest there has been a pattern to the references which have been made to this matter, leading to the conclusion that there is now urgency of debate.