

*International Wheat Agreement*

I think the hon. member for Assiniboia will remember that debate and realize that when he refers to Mr. Howe as an optimist—which most of us now recognize he is—his remarks would probably not be understood in the context of the debate on the international wheat agreement which we are having today.

**Mr. Argue:** May I briefly interrupt my hon. friend to say that I was referring to statements the former minister made in this house in answer to questions of mine, and to statements he made in other debates many times—almost every week—in which he was overly optimistic.

**Mr. Benidickson:** May I suggest to my hon. friend that my memory is as good as his, and I fail to remember many occasions when what my hon. friend calls the optimism of Mr. Howe was not recognized by all as being the realism which so characterized his conduct and attitudes.

The merits of the international wheat agreement are generally agreed upon by all parties of the house. When this matter was presented in 1956 by the then government and the resolution was introduced by Mr. Howe, the present Prime Minister, who was then the chief agricultural critic of the Conservative party, indicated that he had views not very different from those of the mover of the resolution. At page 7055 of *Hansard* of August 6, 1956 the present Prime Minister said:

It is of interest to note that in effect what has been done in respect of the amounts purchaseable under this agreement is the establishment of a floor price for wheat. That is an important matter and achieves in part, although to a limited extent as compared to previous agreements, something that the farmer in this country and I think generally throughout the world does desire, a stabilizing security and a floor price.

**Mr. Churchill:** Mr. Speaker—

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** I must advise the house that by speaking now the minister will close the debate.

**Mr. Churchill:** Mr. Speaker, I thought I might say a word or two in answer to the hon. members who have spoken, the hon. member for Essex East and the hon. member for Assiniboia. I welcomed the explanation given by the hon. member for Kenora-Rainy River. There is obviously general agreement with regard to the international wheat agreement. The comments made by my hon. friends have been objective and indicate a knowledge of the subject.

Their criticisms of the wheat agreement were valid in part. I have made no claim that this agreement is perfect, and I doubt that a claim of that nature has been made by any other participant in the agreement.

I have never suggested that it would solve all our difficulties. My hon. friends have pointed out some of the things which perhaps are not settled by this present agreement.

The hon. member for Essex East raised several problems. He pointed out that this does not necessarily guarantee stability in wheat prices, but it goes quite a long distance toward so doing, just as any international commodity agreement does. He suggested that there would be no major increase through the participation of the United Kingdom in terms of purchases of Canadian wheat. That may be so. Britain is perhaps our most stable market for Canadian wheat, however, and I see no reason to worry about it.

The hon. gentleman drew attention to the increasing surpluses in world wheat supplies, with which subject I shall deal in just a moment. He noted that the Soviet union was not a signatory to the treaty, nor has it been to the others. He raised a question with regard to the European common market. I might say on this point that the countries of Europe which are in the common market, and also are members of the international wheat agreement, will not find that their arrangements under the common market will interfere with the arrangements they have made under the international wheat agreement. Therefore I do not think there is anything to worry about concerning the development of the common market in so far as the international trade in wheat is concerned. Those countries which have been international traders and international purchasers will continue to be so whether or not they are members of the common market.

Then my hon. friend had something to say with regard to the United States and suggested that article 21, subsection 4, went almost as far as to give approval to what might be called bad practices in world trading in wheat. The hon. member for Assiniboia, however, drew our attention to an earlier section of article 21, and I should like to read paragraph (c) of subsection 1 which he touched upon. It reads:

To assist it—

That is the council.

—in its review of surplus disposals, exporting and importing countries shall inform the council of the measures taken by them to secure compliance with the following principles: that the solutions to the problems involved in the disposal of surpluses of wheat should be sought, wherever possible, through efforts to increase consumption; that disposals should take place in an orderly manner; and that, where surpluses are disposed of under special terms, exporting and importing countries concerned should undertake that such arrangements will be made without harmful interference with normal patterns of production and international commercial trade.