

Supply—Trade and Commerce

Mr. Nasserden: I can tell the minister on this occasion that price alone is not bothering the farmers of western Canada. The 590 million bushels of carryover is bothering them, as well as the fact that sales have slumped and that we have lost markets to other nations. These things are bothering them. Then, this minister says and the hon. member for Medicine Hat says: "This government acted within a period of three days." Where have the minister and the government been since last June when prices first began to decline? Does one wait for a catastrophe to arrive, or does one look at what is happening, recognize the trend and try to stave off the trouble, thereby saving the taxpayers of this country something in the process? That is what the government that preceded this one did.

On the front benches of the opposition side of the house sits an hon. member who was the minister of trade and commerce in the former government. He and his prime minister went to Washington to stave off problems similar to those we are now experiencing. That was back in 1958.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Nasserden: Well, we have not got the \$2 wheat that the government promised; we have not even got the old promise, that they were to give to the producers in western Canada \$1 a bushel more on the first 300 bushels of wheat. That, also, would have cost the treasury a great deal of money. The government's action does not recognize the serious problem caused by increasing costs that bear heavily on individual producers and the agricultural industry of western Canada and other parts of the country. During the past year these costs have risen at a tremendous rate.

I see that the minister who is in charge of housing is in the house. Well, there is a housing crisis in this country; there is also a crisis in agriculture, in international affairs and in national unity. There is a crisis in almost every area in which this government has responsibility. Yet always the answer that the opposition has been given has been: "We have taken action; let us wait and see"; or, "We will take action tomorrow," or "A royal commission is to be set up to study the problem."

The role of the opposition in Canada has been questioned by some during the past several months. The role of the parliamentary opposition is to warn of what may take place in the country, to warn of what may take

[Mr. Churchill.]

place in housing, agriculture or international affairs. This government was warned of what would happen. The former minister of agriculture, who is not here today—

An hon. Member: Where is he?

Mr. Nasserden: He is where he should be today.

An hon. Member: Where?

Mr. Nasserden: Explaining to the farmers of Saskatchewan some of the shortcomings of the administration—

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Nasserden: —of the administration that sits on the government side. I want the Prime Minister to consider what I am about to say. The Canadian Wheat Board should be under the Minister of Agriculture. This is where it was when we formed the government. Today's announcement does not take into consideration the welfare of our grain producers. This policy is a makeshift; if the board were under the Minister of Agriculture we could hold him responsible. As it is, the Minister of Trade and Commerce can say: "Agriculture is under the Minister of Agriculture and I cannot answer for him." So, we can have this buck passing between ministers.

The Minister of Trade and Commerce would not do that, I know. He does not like the idea that the Minister of Agriculture can do anything in a better way than he can, but that is an aside.

As I said, the Canadian Wheat Board should be under the Department of Agriculture. The Minister of Agriculture, the Prime Minister and the Minister of Trade and Commerce could have met United States authorities at any time since June, discussed these matters, and protected not only Canadian producers but also the integrity of the international wheat agreement. The producers of western Canada fought for this agreement over the years. They cherish it and it is something they will defend with their last vote and their last dollar. Members of the government should remember that. When the government say, "We had to wait until the price of wheat went below the floor" is to admit that this problem did not get the consideration it deserved. That made me really disappointed with the Minister of Trade and Commerce. I have a high regard for him; I thought he was coming along fine. In fact, I