

Inquiries of the Ministry

In view of the ministers' statements and of the fact that the wheat problem is twofold, having to do with exporting countries and with Canadian wheat producers, and because the problem partly falls on the producers who are now burdened with it, could the minister tell us whether the studies presently considered by himself, the Prime Minister and the Minister of Agriculture aim at the establishment of support prices for the production of Canadian wheat?

Mr. Pepin: Mr. Speaker, at the moment, I do not wish to make any comments about that.

[*English*]

Hon. D. S. Harkness (Calgary Centre): A supplementary question, Mr. Speaker. Since the I.G.A. minimums are no longer effective, at what price below these I.G.A. minimums is the Canadian Wheat Board offering our wheat at the present time in order to meet world competition?

Mr. Pepin: Mr. Speaker, we are offering it at the best possible price. What was done in Washington was to prevent a great downward movement and collapse of prices. That was the purpose of our meeting. We thought that some exporters who had been quite successful in recent weeks, and I will not comment on how they went about their business, would restrain their aggressiveness. Some of them have offered to do that. There will be a readjustment of prices but at a lower level obviously than the minimums under the I.G.A. but a higher level than might otherwise have been the case. Exactly what will happen I do not know. We shall have to wait and see. It is possible that some exporters will strengthen their prices and that others will adjust them downwards, thus bringing about a new level of prices. We must also remember that some exporters do not belong to the I.G.A. They must also be taken into consideration.

Mr. S. J. Korchinski (Mackenzie): A supplementary question, Mr. Speaker. At the meeting was there any indication of how long this present trend will endure? Is relief in sight? Will there be any relief in the next several months? Can the minister indicate whether there will be any relief for the farmers who are growing crops and delivering grain?

Mr. Pepin: Mr. Speaker, the purpose of the exercise was to prevent a possible collapse of international prices. We wanted to prevent a greater downward movement of prices and to restore the co-operation among IGA exporters.

[*Mr. Fortin.*]

ters. On both counts, I am an optimist. I think progress was made. I am not in the habit of telling the house anything except what I feel I am justified in telling it. In this case, and I have said this in answers to previous questions, I am optimistic but without illusions. We are working hard, both diplomatically and commercially, in order to arrest the downward movement which has been going on in this connection.

Mr. Korchinski: Mr. Speaker, will the situation last for the duration of the present crop year?

Mr. Pepin: It depends on how willing exporters are to co-operate and on the will of importers to take a long view of these matters.

Mr. Harkness: A further supplementary question, Mr. Speaker. Did I understand the minister correctly, when he answered my previous question, that the Wheat Board is not quoting prices at this time? If that is so, how are we to make sales? Unless prices are quoted to prospective customers, how are we to sell wheat?

Mr. Pepin: Mr. Speaker, I am sure the Wheat Board is quoting prices at this time. I am also under the impression that importers at the moment are being restrained because of the uncertainty connected with current developments.

Mr. Harkness: Mr. Speaker, then may I repeat my first question. If the Wheat Board is quoting prices, what prices is it quoting in order to sell Canadian wheat?

Mr. Pepin: Mr. Speaker, I will send the hon. member a price schedule tomorrow.

Hon. George Hees (Prince Edward-Has-tings): A supplementary question, Mr. Speaker. Did not those at the conference conclude that an agreement among sellers could only stand as long as a sellers' market prevailed?

Mr. Pepin: Mr. Speaker, there is some truth to that, and it applies not only to wheat marketing. That is true of all other kinds of commercial activity. However, that proposition is not infallible because, as I have said previously, there must be co-operation between exporters. In the long run that will serve the best interests of importers.

Mr. Hees: Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, human nature prevails.