

*Canadian Wheat Board Act*

We will walk together and bring the press with us. He will find grain piled up on the farms everywhere.

**Mr. Lang:** Oh, oh.

**Mr. Woolliams:** The minister laughs.

**Mr. Lang:** Because you were not saying so a year ago.

**Mr. Woolliams:** If the minister thinks we were not saying so, he must have had ear plugs or else it was beyond his comprehension. Do you know, Mr. Speaker, what they are really frightened of? They told me this in Saskatchewan the other day. They said that things are so bad for the minister, they are frightened he will be defeated and will return to being dean of the university. This would be one of the worst things that could happen.

I want to finish what I was saying. The supply of wheat is building up on the farms, as well as other crops, but there is no cash on the farms. Farmers cannot meet their expenses and liabilities. That is the true story, and that is the story that Saskatchewan knows. If Mr. Thatcher were to sneak through in this election, the only way in which he would do it would be on the strength of his performance. But he and his advisers know that what he has to fight today is not the NDP but the performance of this government.

**Mr. Rod Thompson (Battleford-Kindersley):** I am not sure that I can show the same enthusiasm as has my hon. friend, the hon. member for Calgary North (Mr. Woolliams) when he talked about walking or travelling through the grain belt arm in arm with the minister. I suggest to him that if he were to do so, it would not do him any good politically out there.

The minister obviously wants to put the best face on his performance. In looking at the federal government statistics on farm income in Saskatchewan—and we are talking about net income, not gross income—I see a drop from \$354 million in 1967 to \$202 million. That is quite a drop when you speak in terms of net income. I do not know whether the minister has had enough farming experience to know what this really means, but surely his intellectual understanding of the problem should be adequate, even if his personal experience is not.

No act is any better than the government that administers it. I suggest that generally speaking the Wheat Board has not done too bad a job, in spite of the government as has been suggested, but frequently when they did not do a good job the reason was that they did not have the tools needed at the time. I should like to suggest some of the things that should have been done sooner in relation to the proposals now put forward by the minister.

● (3:40 p.m.)

One of the first things I would like to talk about is credit sales. We saw what happened when the government began to guarantee wheat sales to countries which had dollar problems. Mr. Speaker, if I were a country purchasing wheat and had to buy it with American dollars or gold, in all probability I would buy American

[Mr. Woolliams.]

wheat rather than Canadian wheat. It seems to me that our government has insisted on a method of pricing that operates only in Canada's favour. We want the best of both worlds, but this is not the way things work. When the Wheat Board began to use the mechanism of credit sales it immediately increased its sales. I have heard the minister talk about this. Mr. Speaker, I was a Wheat Board delegate in the years 1954 to 1959, and we were talking about credit sales then, not to mention other things. It seems that before the federal government wakes up to a situation and takes action, someone has to go broke or reach the verge of bankruptcy.

The subject of pricing should have been examined by the Wheat Board a little sooner. I am not speaking as a producer of grain, but I think there have been times, if we had been on the ball, when we could have sold more grain at a better price, both in Canada and abroad. We should have been awake to what was happening to world prices. I believe that producers should be paid, through the Wheat Board, an adequate price for wheat consumed in Canada. I suggest that that price should be at least \$1 more per bushel than the selling price abroad. At least that price would be comparable with the prices farmers have to pay for goods and services. If the minister does not want to accept my advice, or the advice of others like me, I would invite him to try a little farming on his own. These are the kinds of tools that the Wheat Board must use if it is to do a good job on behalf of the grain producers.

I have checked on some of the countries that purchased wheat from Canada through credit arrangements, and I have discovered that we have not sold significant quantities to some of them since 1952, while to others we have sold none at all since 1952. If grain had been sold to those countries during the intervening years, we would not have the surplus in Canada that we have now. When we first heard about the awkward problem facing the grain producers of western Canada we pointed out that the growing surplus of grain would be reflected in the future of the livestock industry. Just a few days ago I heard some Quebec members complain about the low price of pork in that province. One thing leads to another. The government did not act soon enough in one area, and the problem moved into another area. Surplus grain was converted into surplus pork, and now Ontario and Quebec farmers are facing the result.

Some of the changes brought about by the Canada Grains Act should have been enacted much sooner, and here I refer to protein grading, mixing at the terminals, and credit sales. The other change envisaged by the minister is the bringing of flax, rye and rapeseed under the authority of the Wheat Board. I think it is high time that this was done, but I cannot help but wonder why the minister is doing it now. I read his speech the other day in preparation for this debate. He said that, although he proposes to bring rapeseed, rye and flax seed under the Wheat Board, he does not intend to use those provisions of the bill now. Why bring those grains under the Wheat Board if this is the case? Must we read between the lines of his speech? I hope that when he replies he will tell us why he is including these grains. What is the purpose?