

*Canada Grain Act*

The hon. member has referred to the matter of the distribution of box cars. My hon. friend has closed that door himself. He has advocated his ideas on the floor of the house, and his bill has been rejected by the house. Surely he does not expect to have another debate on the distribution of box cars at this session. I believe that is quite obvious. I have never tried to minimize the discussion of wheat matters. I have gone beyond the ordinary rule in answering questions in this house. I have answered questions that under the practice built up over the years perhaps should not have been answered. The practice has been that we do not discuss the marketing of wheat from the current crop. In other words, we do not answer questions bearing upon marketing in the current marketing year. However, I have stretched that rule to the limit.

Today hon. members are in a position where a committee meeting can be called and officers of the wheat board or the board of grain commissioners can be called before the committee. Witnesses from any farm organization can be called and, so far as I know, so long as the subject is one that is touched upon in either annual report any questions can be asked of those witnesses.

Now, my hon. friend asks why this is not the year to spend the whole session investigating the wheat board.

**Mr. Argue:** Not the wheat board, I never mentioned the wheat board.

**Mr. Howe (Port Arthur):** Well, the board of grain commissioners. This is perhaps as difficult a year from the point of view of the board of grain commissioners as any year we have ever experienced. We have congestion from one end of the handling system to the other. I know the board of grain commissioners are being run ragged, if you will allow that unparliamentary expression, in trying to deal with the situations that arise from day to day. I doubt if any responsible member in this house would say that work should be suspended and the board of grain commissioners, instead of functioning in the usual way, must come to Ottawa and start functioning in a wholly different way. I know of no other way of overhauling the grain act except to have the experts here in Ottawa to help in the discussion.

I am willing to be reasonable about these things. I believe the thing in which the western farmer is interested is in getting his wheat to market and having it converted into cash. Every Department of Trade and Commerce official is directing his effort towards that end. I have noticed that the

[Mr. Howe (Port Arthur).]

farm organizations are very reasonable. They seem to agree with my viewpoint. They say that when everything is abnormal in the grain situation as it is today, that is not the time to enact legislation designed for years in the future. I think that is agreed. I believe that if my hon. friend will reflect he will realize that the energies of our experts can be better devoted to present-day responsibilities than to his purposes. I have heard no great echo of his purposes from other hon. members in this chamber. I have not heard any member stand up and say, that is the thing we should do. I believe most members are responsible enough to know that we should get on with the main job, which is marketing this wheat.

**Mr. Argue:** They echoed it a year ago.

**Mr. Howe (Port Arthur):** My hon. friend has not been able to carry his views. The reason the house has not complied with his wishes that these matters be referred to the committee is that not too many people agree with him. I have noticed the tendency lately of the opposition party to believe that parliament exists wholly in the opposition. The other side does not count if the opposition wants to do something. That is a theory that should not be adopted in this house.

**Mr. Coldwell:** We have learned differently from time to time.

**Mr. Howe (Port Arthur):** That is my view, but nevertheless I have no desire to stifle the committee on agriculture or any other committee. I ask the committee to be reasonable in the demands that they place on an organization that is busily engaged in other ways. If it is a case of getting the board of grain commissioners to come down here for a week or perhaps two weeks—any reasonable period—there is no objection to that. However, to ask them to come down here for a month or a period of months might well wreck the grain handling situation in the west. My officers are geared to that kind of operation. I am quite willing to ask the board to come here. I am quite willing to ask the wheat board to come. I shall be glad to do so whenever the committee indicates that the time is convenient to them. In this year I am not prepared to go beyond that, and make unusual demands on the time of either body.

**Mr. Argue:** I should like to ask one question before the minister sits down. From his statement, I take it he has no objection to hearing representatives of the various farm organizations on any point whatever in the Canada Grain Act, even though it might not appear in the annual report?