

Inquiries of the Ministry

Hon. Jean-Luc Pepin (Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce): Mr. Speaker, this question gives me the opportunity to say that the hon. member for Saskatoon-Humboldt, minister without portfolio, is now responsible to the House for the Canadian Wheat Board.

Mr. Caouette: Mr. Speaker, could the minister responsible answer the question?

[English]

Hon. Otto E. Lang (Minister without Portfolio): Mr. Speaker, there have been announcements over recent months about specific sales of grain. There was an exchange in the House Wednesday concerning negotiations with the Soviet Union on the old and new agreements. The remark I made then was that it is not good practice to comment on discussions or negotiations which are, or are about to be, under way, so I have no comment to make about this matter.

[Translation]

Mr. Caouette: Mr. Speaker, I wish to put a supplementary question to the Minister without Portfolio.

The minister is probably not in a position to give us any details, because it would undoubtedly not be in the public interest, but can he give us some hope that the matter will be definitely settled?

[English]

Mr. Lang: Mr. Speaker, I should like to assure the hon. member of my great and continuing optimism about this and all other subjects that I deal with.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

NORTHERN SASKATCHEWAN AND ALBERTA—
ASSISTANCE TO GROWERS

Mr. G. W. Baldwin (Peace River): I have a supplementary question, Mr. Speaker. In view of the very aggravated situation in northern Saskatchewan and northern Alberta because of weather conditions there, has the minister anything to offer to the House by way of some form of relief for those people with regard to last year's crop other than what is contained in the pot of political pabulum disguised as a Throne Speech?

Hon. Otto E. Lang (Minister without Portfolio): Mr. Speaker, it is at least one of the brighter facets of having a surplus of grain that those farmers who have not been

able to harvest this year's crop are not as handicapped in filling quotas, with grain on hand from previous years, as they have sometimes been.

TRADE

SOVIET UNION—NEGOTIATIONS TO EXPAND

Mr. A. P. Gleave (Saskatoon-Biggar): Mr. Speaker, may I address a question either to the Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce or to the Minister without Portfolio. Is there under way any study or negotiations that will lead to some expansion of trade with the Soviet Union on a permanent basis so that the kinds of sales which have been made will continue on a regular and rational basis?

Hon. Jean-Luc Pepin (Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce): Mr. Speaker, as hon. members know, the commercial agreement with the Soviet Union came to an end before the wheat contract itself came to legal termination last July, I believe. Our position is that we wish to clear the ground and come to the conclusion on the wheat aspects of our relations with the Soviet Union and then enter into negotiation on the renewal of the commercial agreement itself.

Mr. Gleave: A supplementary question, Mr. Speaker. My question to the minister really was whether negotiations are being conducted of a kind that will lead to a real expansion in trade between our two countries?

Mr. Pepin: Mr. Speaker, my answer was quite clear when I said that we want to get the wheat aspect behind us before we become involved in further commercial negotiations with the U.S.S.R.

RATE OF INCREASE OF EXPORTS

Hon. George Hees (Prince Edward-Hastings): Mr. Speaker, may I direct a question to the Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce. As Canada's export trade has been expanding at half the rate experienced by Great Britain, the United States and Japan and at one-third the rate experienced by the ten principal industrial countries of Europe, would the minister take the first opportunity on motions to outline to the House and country what steps he and his department plan to take to bring our rate of increase of exports at least up to the level of our principal industrial competitors?

Hon. Jean-Luc Pepin (Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce): Mr. Speaker, I will