

*Canadian Wheat Board Act*

undermined an institution on which western farmers have learned to depend and trust.

The mandate of the Canadian Wheat Board is to sell grain for the farmers at the best possible price. The regulations and the sales process that have been in place since 1935 were established to allow the Board to fulfil that mandate. Most farmers would not want to see its ability to fulfil that mandate undermined.

The Wheat Board has expressed the hope that it will be able to sell more grains when the free trade agreement is signed and the markets are opened. I know that the Minister has suggested that the Canola market would be expanded. It may be a surprise to some to learn that we already sell a considerable amount of our high quality wheat to the United States, who very much appreciate the quality of our wheat and mix it with their own low grade wheats for the making of much of their pastry and bread.

I think they will buy much more wheat than has been sold to them, but I wonder whether the U.S. farmers will stand still for this kind of incursion into their market. How will they react? The Wheat Board, with its mandate to control imports and exports, has always limited the amount sold to the United States in view of the concern about any reaction by the United States to our exports. I am not sure that a free trade deal would give us that protection.

I want to thank the Deputy House Leader and the Chairman of the Agriculture Committee, who is in the House, for changing the reference of this Bill from a legislative committee to the Standing Committee on Agriculture. I had some concern about this because the areas which are being changed by the Bill require some study on the part of the Standing Committee on Agriculture and the entire agricultural community. Consequently, that would not likely happen if the matter were referred to a legislative committee that has been set up for a short period of time and dies immediately upon the Bill being reported to the House. There is a need for all members of the agriculture committee to have insight in respect of the Bill.

● (1600)

I understand that at some time in the future the Minister is likely to bring in some changes to the Canada Grains Act and that those changes will be affected by any study that takes place.

I recognize that generally the Bill is a housekeeping Bill. Most of its clauses are of value to the board and its operations. As I said, perhaps they are long overdue in some cases.

I am also concerned about the fact—and the previous speaker mentioned it—that there does not seem to have been a great deal of consultation in terms of the drafting of the Bill with the people who are to be affected by it. I called three advisory committee members and not one of them knew what was in the Bill. They had not been consulted in any way.

I was particularly concerned because one thing the Bill would do is pay them a little more for their work, and I think we all agree with that. However, in the précis which we received from the department it was suggested that there be an amendment to expand the number of activities of advisory committee members for which per diem payments could be made to facilitate their additional involvement in developing policy advice for the board. Representatives of the producers are elected to the advisory committee to make suggestions to the Canadian Wheat Board. The Minister said that these amendments were recommended by the board, but they were never tried out on the advisory committee. It is worth while for the Bill to go to the Standing Committee on Agriculture for advisory committee representatives to appear before to discuss how producers feel about these changes.

Coincidentally, the day before yesterday I had occasion to talk with the three presidents of the prairie pools which handle approximately 60 per cent of prairie grain. They were a little surprised by the Bill and some of its clauses. I think they should also be given an opportunity to appear before the committee and express their concerns. That may not change the Bill. In fact, it may not be the desire of any of the groups to change it.

I would like to refer to the transportation change. Both CN and CP are required to handle producer cars, for instance. I am not sure whether they have been contacted, but they may have some concerns about that suggestion. I should say that some people I contacted knew about some of the changes but not all of them. I was particularly surprised that the advisory committee had not been fully briefed and did not know what changes were to be made.

I do not intend to speak much longer, but I would like to go over some of the changes to the Act. I have no particular concern about the addition of Canola under the Act. It probably should have been there before.

I appreciate the probable need for changes in borrowing. In talking with people involved with the Canadian Wheat Board over the years, I can see the value of that, but I have a couple of questions which I would like to ask of Canadian Wheat Board officials.

Probably we have not been giving committee members the amount of remuneration they had the right to expect since they were elected members. For instance, the member from Alberta can spend a day getting to Winnipeg for a day's meeting and another day getting back. Under the old structure he was paid for only one day. This piece of legislation would allow the Canadian Wheat Board to pay them more than it has in the past. They can also be paid for attending subcommittee meetings, which in itself is valuable. If they are not being paid to attend subcommittee meetings, quite often the fellow who is closest attends. However, if one is from northern Alberta, for example, it is a little difficult to be part of a subcommittee meeting in Winnipeg over a longer period of time. In any event, many committee members who are now serving and