

*International Wheat Agreement*

**Mr. W. G. Weir (Portage-Neepawa):** Mr. Speaker, I am sure we who come from western Canada and who are largely interested in the growing of cereal grain have welcomed the general expression of opinion which has taken place this afternoon on this resolution introduced by the Minister of Trade and Commerce (Mr. Howe). I think it has been singularly significant that the representatives of all the political parties in this house who have spoken, and who come from western Canada, have, as I have understood it, given their approval to the general principle of entering into this international wheat agreement. It is true that some may have criticized some of the terms; some have expressed disappointment with respect to certain features of it, but generally speaking the principle of Canada entering into this international wheat agreement has been fairly generally accepted.

I think that is a good thing to have happen. I am sure that it fairly well reflects the general viewpoint of the farmers of western Canada, in that they want to see the international wheat agreement continued for a further period. It is true that there are certain features of it that have proved to be a little bit disappointing. However, by and large, the wheat agreement, with the stability it has brought with it, I think has lent a measure of confidence to those who have been producing wheat, and has encouraged them to feel that at least the government in this country, and those in other countries as well, have recognized the problem of marketing this important food commodity.

For my part I may say that I have been associated, indirectly and rather actively, over a quite considerable period of time in the marketing of wheat. I am one of those who can look back on the experience following the first world war and the efforts that were made shortly after that to establish the voluntary pooling idea, which was followed by state marketing. As to the voluntary pooling idea compared to what we have under the wheat board act, so far as practical experience goes the fundamentals are not materially different other than that in this instance there is the added stability gained by having the government endorsing the wheat marketing arrangement.

Then too, with reference to supporting this international wheat agreement for a further period, I think there is something else of particular significance and that is the position of the United States. While our friends have expressed concern because the United Kingdom was not a party to the agreement—and I share that disappointment—it would be of greater significance if the United States

were not a party to it. In fact, if the United States had not signed the international wheat agreement I doubt very much whether an agreement would have been completed.

The position of the United States is singularly important in a transaction of this kind. When the hon. member for Souris (Mr. Ross) refers to what he claims to be the losses that have been sustained by the farmers of western Canada because of the wheat agreement, both the international wheat agreement and the United Kingdom wheat agreement, I say that his calculations cannot be substantiated in dollars and cents by any means whatsoever. The agreement itself, with a price tag on it, if you like, meant that there was a figure that people generally had agreed to accept. Had that figure not been there, had that agreement not been made, no one can say what the price of wheat might have been. It might have gone higher; it might have gone lower, but at least that was the target. I am of the view that that figure in itself had an influence on world prices generally, and that we gained thereby.

In addition, in our experience in Canada in the last two years particularly, when we have been blessed with good crops in western Canada, one of which was in a very bad condition, I am sure the wheat agreement and the marketing of wheat through the Canadian wheat board have meant a good deal in dollars and cents to the farmers of western Canada that they might easily have lost otherwise. Had the damp crop of last year been dumped on the market I do not know where the price would have gone. That is something to be borne in mind.

I want to come back to what I started to project into my reasoning in so far as the United States is concerned. We hear a good deal about the price marketing policy of the United States in so far as agricultural products are concerned. I think anyone who is reasonable at all recognizes that the position in the United States with respect to agricultural prices is wholly and entirely different from our situation in Canada, and particularly so with respect to wheat. Here we are obliged to export about 75 per cent of the wheat we produce, while in the United States they consume about 75 per cent of their production. That means that they can adopt a price policy in so far as wheat is concerned that is wholly different from anything we might try to institute in this country. I say that because I am sure what the reaction of the taxpayers would be if we attempted to maintain a price in the way they do in the United States.

But that is not all. The point that I want to emphasize here—I have not heard any others put forward the argument very