

Wheat Sales

If my friends in the NDP feel this is acceptable, I suppose that is their decision and they will have to live with it. But I feel that those who think they are truly representing western constituencies in which agriculture is the main occupation will have to answer a lot of very serious questions. For whatever reason they vote with the government on this motion, that is fine; but we in this party believe that what our motion calls for is the right thing to do at this point in time.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Murta: We believe this motion is acceptable because the Canadian Wheat Board has the funds out of which to pay an extra 30 cents a bushel at the present time, and they should do so. To back up our argument in support of paying an extra 30 cents a bushel, let me point out that at the present time we are facing rapidly rising costs in agriculture. I should like to read part of an editorial that appeared in the *Free Press Weekly*. I feel this is a relatively objective article, which reads in part:

They would like to see some form of price controls. But price controls would be grossly unfair without wage controls as well, and this is an issue which government, so far, has refused to tackle. Until it does, the inflation spiral will continue. There is no point (on the issue of farm products) in blaming the farmer. According to the most recent report from Statistics Canada, the farmer, like everybody else, must have more for his product. His costs are spiralling too.

Farm costs, according to the report, went up 6.1 per cent in the first three months of this year (4.4 per cent in western Canada, 7.6 per cent in the east). The increase was largely due to increases of 18 per cent for livestock feed, 15.3 per cent for feeder cattle, 31.1 per cent for seed. At the same time food prices (including farm products) rose by 3.5 per cent.

The point is that the farmer, like everybody else, is caught in the inflation bind. He is not profiteering from a situation designed for his benefit. He is as much a victim of that situation as anyone else. Indeed, compared to people in many other lines of endeavour, he has much more of which to complain. The increase in his income has not matched the increase in his costs.

For him, as for the public at large, there can be no solution to his problem until government tackles not just one phase of the inflation issue but all of it—wages, profits and prices alike.

The farmer is caught in a form of cost-price squeeze because of rising costs. This is another reason we believe there is a need for the injection of cash into western Canada. Once again, if the NDP does not believe this, that is their problem and they will have to live with it.

Mr. Alexander: That is their funeral.

Mr. Murta: We have discussed this afternoon the method used by the Wheat Board in selling grain. We had a situation which has been cited many times—it is well known in the grain trade—in which barley was sold, was picked up by Italian grain traders and resold by them at considerable profit. This is the kind of thing our motion is designed to stop.

We are also concerned about the quantity of grain on the farms. At the present time there is a need to increase deliveries of grain off the farms. Deliveries are slowing down because farmers are holding back their grain, and rightly so, until after the end of this crop year when they will very likely receive a higher final price. It is interesting to note that the quantity of wheat being delivered off farms is falling drastically at this time compared to last

[Mr. Murta.]

year. Perhaps part of the reason is that farmers are seeding; but they were also seeding at this time last year.

Let me give some comparisons. On April 2, off-farm grain deliveries were 7.2 million bushels in 1973, whereas in 1972 they were 11.2 million bushels. On May 16, 1973, off-farm deliveries amounted to 6.2 million bushels, while in 1972 they amounted to 9.2 million bushels. On May 30, which is the last date in respect of which I have been able to obtain information, the figure dropped to 3.9 million bushels, compared to 6.5 million bushels in 1972. This is an indication of a very great reluctance by farmers to deliver wheat at this time because of apprehension that there will not be a high enough final payment as a result of the Wheat Board being caught with long-term contracts having failed to read the market in the proper way when grain prices started to rise.

The minister responsible for the Wheat Board gave us some prices this afternoon which I think probably have never been given in the House of Commons before. He cited grain shipments to Russia in 1972. His figures are very likely accurate and I do not think anyone quarrels with them, but I question the fact that all grain sold in March, 1973, as recorded by Statistics Canada under exports by commodities was sold under long-term contract. The minister did not mention that, but picked out one selective figure and used it.

● (2020)

If the NDP dispute the fact that farmers are not making deliveries and do not believe they should receive a higher price at the present time to compensate for the losses they have suffered—the mechanism is there, and the money is certainly their own—then I would very much question the sincerity of the two speakers of the NDP and the true motive behind their intention to vote against our motion. I believe our party is trying to present something positive for the farmers in order to give them a decent standard of living. This is the sole purpose of the presentation of our motion.

The minister responsible for the Wheat Board, as I mentioned before, has indicated some figures that very likely will be helpful. I certainly hope he can continue giving the farmers of western Canada some indication of what really is going on in their own industry. I consider that an appalling thing happened this spring. The Wheat Board conducted a survey to determine how much grain was on the farms in western Canada. They refused to release the figures of the amount of grain on hand at that time.

This is an indication of the kind of isolation in which the minister responsible for the Wheat Board is working. At times he seems to want to become an all-encompassing power, having complete authority for the direction of the body that was set up primarily for the benefit of the western farmer. I am critical, as I am sure are other members, as well as a great many farmers, of the way the Wheat Board has been used for the minister's own purposes and for those of the Liberal Party.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Murta: An indication of this—and we have heard about it time and time again—is Operation Lift. This was