

Canadian Wheat Board Act

represent something over three-quarters of our grain growers in the three prairie provinces, then I have missed my guess. The minister has talked about plebiscites for how many years? He can count them up. They have asked, demanded and pleaded in briefs and resolutions that these grains be brought under the jurisdiction of the Canadian Wheat Board. Whether it is the Winnipeg Grain Exchange, so to speak, the private grain trade or the grain trade as a whole, including farmers' own companies, none by itself can work in the best interests of grain producers in terms of the maximum price for the product. Only a government-operated board could do this.

● (9:40 p.m.)

The minister has to decide which way he is going to go on this. He is invited to put his proposals to the grain growers in the three prairie provinces, and that is the majority. They have submitted views year after year asking that these grains be brought under the jurisdiction of the Wheat Board.

We hear a great deal about the block system and the switching of cars. I might say for the edification of my colleague, the hon. member for Moose Jaw (Mr. Skoberg), that the minister finally agreed that farmer-owned grain companies should not be penalized for the spotting of cars that they load on the Prairies to be moved to terminals owned by the private grain trade by not being reimbursed for their costs and given their share of the market. I hope the minister is not trying to tell me that question did not enter the discussions. I hope the minister is not trying to say that was not taken into consideration when the agreement was arrived at to spot cars loaded by the Saskatchewan, Alberta and Manitoba wheat pools at the terminals of private companies. If he does try to tell us that, I am going to ask some of the officials of the three pools to give us their side of the argument.

The grain growers in the three prairie provinces have been asking for the provisions, which are only permissive in this legislation, since the 1940s—and we have had governments of the two old line parties since that time. All these governments have failed to acquiesce to the demands of the grain growers, and this government still fails to do so. The minister can sit there from now until the day he is finished as a minister, however long that may be, and never move the grain in the interests of the producers until it is done under the Canadian Wheat Board. I submit that it would be more efficient and more representative of the grain interests, not only to the producers but also to the handlers of grain, if they were all working under one jurisdiction, the Canadian Wheat Board.

This would save the grain producers money and the minister a lot of headaches. This may not be all that good for those who want to speculate and be parasites; and there are still some hangers-on from as far back as the dirty thirties. They want their day, and want their marbles without doing a day's work. There are still those who want to speculate on futures by being dealers rather than buyers and sellers of Canadian grain.

[Mr. Benjamin.]

It seems to me the minister should invite the grain trade and the producers to operate under the jurisdiction of a national marketing grain agency, namely the Canadian Wheat Board. In this way he could prove once and for all that he means business and that this is one area where private enterprise has no cotton-picking business. He could even put his friends in the official opposition on the spot, as they in turn could put the minister on the spot.

We find this situation very amusing at the moment because members on both sides of the House are on both sides of the question. They do not believe entirely in an orderly, public grain marketing system. They talk about plebiscites. Any old line party could organize a plebiscite in relation to the private grain business, the livestock business or anything else. You can put coupons in the newspapers and incite and organize anybody and everybody to write in against something. I wish just for a change one of these parties would organize the people in Canada in favour of something.

It is easy to cook the books beforehand and bring in a red herring such as a plebiscite, as the minister did this afternoon. He has had the results of a plebiscite from the grain growers in the three Prairie Provinces for the last 25 years. This represents the overwhelming majority of grain producers. Some of my relatives who are not members of the NDP are sick, tired and fed up with the old expression—

An hon. Member: They are even more so now.

Mr. Benjamin: You can choose your friends but you are stuck with your relatives. Even some of them are fed up with what is happening in relation to the grain trade, the grain exchange and the industry as a whole. The minister had better make up his mind which way he is going to move. He cannot be for the grain producers on the one hand and against them on the other. I suspect he is even conning his colleagues in the cabinet, who would not know a bushel of anything from their backsides, into going in with him because he has not the nerve to do one thing or the other. He is not the first. All his predecessors in Liberal and Tory governments have not had the nerve to move one way or the other in respect of the demands of the grain producers in the three Prairie Provinces.

The NDP is in the same position as usual in respect of a bill such as this when the government, Liberal or Tory, goes only so far. They are afraid to go the whole way and do what they are talking about. They never do what they say. They talk a good fight and put in all the words that mean orderly marketing. They are all in favour of the Wheat Board. You could not get a Liberal or a Tory in this place to say a word against the Wheat Board. Ask any one of them to give the Canadian Wheat Board the kind of policy that will allow them to function with complete authority in the interests of the grain producers and they will say, "Oh, no. Wait a minute. We have to be careful before we do this. We must hold a plebiscite. We have to think this over some more." My God, we have been thinking it over since 1935. The government said it is not sure yet whether it wants an orderly marketing