

DREE Grant

Obviously I must try to get to the bottom of this matter. I put a call through to Cargill Grain and asked whether it would be proceeding. I was told, "No way, it is unfair competition". Therefore, Cargill will not proceed with the plan. New Democrats who tell me it is a good thing for farmers to deliver 300 miles have something wrong with them. When they say they are going to have farmers deliver for 300 miles, is that supposed to keep costs down?

• (1710)

I have enumerated some of the reasons, Mr. Speaker, and I do not want to dwell on them. The facts speak for themselves. I have indicated that some negative responses have been received. I should like to know who the government listens to. I am satisfied that the minister has not completely closed the door but he certainly has not taken action.

This motion was put on the Order Paper some time ago. I would have been quite prepared to accept some sort of explanation but none was forthcoming. Chambers of commerce and farmers have tried to piece together the mystery of how this government operates, but the question will not be solved until we find out who the government listens to.

I am satisfied that submissions did not come from individual farmers, but chambers of commerce have supported the application. If the information were available it would clear the air and resolve the problem, and it would be beneficial to the NDP to say they endorsed it if a letter was sent. What harm can there be in producing evidence at this time? Surely all hon. members would like to be as informed as possible, but without the information I am seeking no member can decide whether the application was dealt with properly or not.

[Translation]

Mr. André Maltais (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce): Mr. Speaker, although I understand the hon. member's desire to clarify a situation he feels is ambiguous, I still think that raising one's voice is not particularly conducive to obtaining further information for hon. members, and what is important at this stage is to find out exactly why the department decided to set aside, for the time being, the application made by Cargill Grain Limited for a grant to set up a plant in Melfort, Saskatchewan.

First of all, just to get the facts straight, I think the hon. member is aware that, at a meeting of the Standing Committee on Regional Development on March 23 of this year, he had plenty of time to put questions to the minister and to senior officials of the Department of Industry, Trade and Commerce and Regional Economic Expansion, in order to get an accurate picture of the situation. However, the hon. member has so far gone well beyond what the motion as such requests. The motion is quite clear, and requests only, and I quote:

That an Order of the House do issue for copies of all correspondence and communications, including telephone submissions, regarding the application by Cargill Grain Limited for a grant from DREE towards construction of an Oil Seed Crushing Plant at Melfort, Saskatchewan.

What the hon. member is asking in his motion is only that documents be made public. Now, he should know that in a case like this, the ethics of international and national trade, in terms of the free market principle, forbids the production of documents when the public funds requested have not yet been granted to a company. If the hon. member desires specific information on Cargill Grain's projects in that particular area, including projected investments and requests to the department and answers given by the department to the company in question, the hon. member knows perfectly well that his question should be put directly to the company because, at the present time, the Canadian government has not given any public funds to the company.

In fact, the case is being discussed with the management of Cargill Grain Limited and departmental officials, but the department has made it quite clear that if Cargill Grain Limited wanted a review of its application, it would have to provide some new information to support this. Now, in this case, the then Minister of DREE, the hon. member for Matane (Mr. De Bané), wrote to the hon. member, giving him a very specific answer concerning the refusal of the Department of Industry, Trade and Commerce and Regional Economic Expansion, formerly DREE, and this letter which was dated November 2, 1981, is quite clear. It says very explicitly, and I quote:

[English]

After an exhaustive review of the case, I feel confident that Cargill can, and will, proceed with the project without assistance from DREE. The company is financially strong and the project appears to be a wise one from the company's point of view.

[Translation]

So that was the letter, and it goes on to say that since Cargill Grain Limited has the financial resources to carry out its project without government funding, it would perhaps be inappropriate on the part of the government to provide funds to a company which already has the means to carry out its project independently. Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, Cargill Grain Limited applied pursuant to the provisions of the Regional Development Incentives Act. The legislation is quite clear. It authorizes the department to grant funds to a company, provided it can demonstrate a real need. Until now—and here opinions may differ—according to the experts in this field, the conclusion is that Cargill Grain Limited is capable of building its plant without outside help. Now, when an application is sent to the department, the people who are there to find out whether there is a real need, take the time to make a thorough analysis of the case. In this case, the hon. member knows perfectly well that the department has several meetings with representatives of Cargill Grain Limited to find out what could be done under the provisions of the Regional Development Incentives Act. The hon. member is also aware that the minister must abide by the law like any other member of this House and like any other Canadian citizen, and that even if the minister wanted to grant the funds requested by Cargill,