

Wheat—Marketing of Surplus

An hon. Member: It is all a mistake.

Mr. Argue: My hon. friend behind me said "oats", and then I said barley. I stand corrected. But I will make this forecast, that just as soon as there is a tiny surplus of American barley, Canadian barley will be added to that list. So if I am not right tonight, it is probably just a matter of time, in the short run, when I will be right, and the Americans will be adding barley to the host of other Canadian agricultural products now prohibited.

Mr. Gardiner: Stay on the short run and you will be all right.

Mr. Argue: We have lost the British market for other products and the British market now is being lost for Canadian wheat. The loss of our overseas market for grain means very serious times ahead for the Canadian wheat producers. And so I say that this government is directly responsible for the economic position of western Canada today.

Mr. Byrne: That's a good one!

Mr. Argue: No attempt has been made to co-operate with the United States in obtaining a common sales policy. The Minister of Agriculture opposed in 1949 an international food pool to take care of our surpluses; and now, five years later, Canada faces the results of that opposition by the Minister of Agriculture in 1949.

And I tell the government this, that the wheat producers of western Canada hold this government responsible for the economic position they are in today. When this session began last fall we in this group asked the government to take steps to put money into the hands of the farmers. We asked the government to make advances to buy grain in store on the farms. And we were told that the economic position was good, that the farmers had never been in a stronger position. The Minister of Agriculture gave his usual line of optimism—that everything was fine, that the export market was running high, that everything was going to be all right in a matter of months.

Well, everything is not all right; everything is getting worse. Our export markets have fallen to the point where the export market for wheat in May of this year showed one of the lowest figures in our history, far below the average for the month of May in exports in the last ten years.

The Minister of Trade and Commerce said, "Oh well, one of the reasons our exports are down is that there was a strike at the port of Vancouver a year ago, and that resulted

in large exports in the month of May, after the strike was over. Our exports in May of last year were 46 million bushels, and for May of this year—and these figures are not absolutely accurate; they are approximate, but the minister said the other day that they are nearly correct—were about 16 million bushels. Two years ago, in 1952, when there was no Vancouver strike, May exports amounted to 43.7 million bushels. If you do not want to take May of last year, take May of two years ago. The exports dropped from 43 million bushels down to 16 million bushels.

I have gone through the wheat board figures back as far as 1946, and I would have gone back even farther but the export figures for wheat were not listed for May in the annual reports before 1946. All of the figures, as you go back, are substantially higher than the export figure for May of this year. In the five-week period a year ago ending June 3, 1953 our exports of wheat were 44 million bushels. In the same five-week period this year our exports of wheat were only 18 million bushels. In the five-week period a year ago our exports of barley were 18 million bushels, and in the recent five-week period our exports of barley were 3 million bushels. Our wheat exports were reduced by 60 per cent; our barley exports were reduced by well over 80 per cent.

I never thought last fall that our May exports would be as low as they are. But I could see that there was difficulty ahead. At that time we asked the Minister of Trade and Commerce to give us a realistic analysis of the situation. Of course when the minister makes a statement he makes the headlines, and we do not complain. The remarks of the rest of us are tucked lower down in the statement or on the third or fourth page. The minister's statement gets the attention and the retailers, the small merchants of western Canada, believe his statement to be accurate. Since they believed that the minister's analysis of the grain situation was correct they gave substantial credit, and today by the dozens all over western Canada implement dealers, automobile dealers and merchants of all kinds are going into bankruptcy.

Mr. Byrne: How is the hardware business?

Mr. Argue: I am talking about the retail merchant in the small town which is in the heart of the wheat-growing area, and the small merchant in the ordinary town in western Canada is facing great difficulty. Part of the reason why he is facing the difficulty is to be found in the kind of advice and the kind of forecasts made by the Minister of Trade and Commerce. He has said in those