

Wheat Market Meeting in Washington

The minister's report does not tell us what is going to be done to correct the substantial differentials of 20 to 25 cents a bushel which exist between our grain and grain of comparative quality with which we compete in the markets. The report does not say that the European common market countries are prepared to support this agreement. It merely says that understandings have been reached with the European Economic Community, subject to the approval of the Council of Ministers representing their member countries, whatever that means. This is the area from which the disruption of the agreement has been coming.

The report speaks of constructive approaches, and I hope there are some. What we need from the minister at this moment is a clear statement of government policy toward the wheat producers of this country in view of the fact that the International Grains Arrangement is not working too well. I hope it will work well in the future. I hope it can be shored up and that these other countries will accept their responsibility as Canada has done. We cannot expect the wheat producers of western Canada to hold an umbrella over the International Grains Arrangement all by themselves. I am sure the minister knows very well this cannot be done by this group of wheat producers.

Therefore I think it is time the government told the grain producers of western Canada frankly what its position is. It should make it clear that it will make support available to the grain producers in terms of price and in terms of quantity, and will also take the responsibility along with other nations of the world to see that the International Grains Arrangement does work. I plead with the minister through you, Mr. Speaker, to come down to earth and say that there will be a support price at some level. If it is to be at \$1.95½ on the basis of the present International Grains Arrangement, let the government say that. If it is going to be \$2, let the government say so. Let us not leave the farmers in the limbo of uncertainty in which they find themselves today.

[Translation]

Mr. André Fortin (Lothbinière): Mr. Speaker, we heard the statement made by the Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce (Mr. Pepin) on his return from Washington where he had talks with the representatives of other countries that signed the International Grains Arrangement.

Before making any comments, Mr. Speaker, I should like to remind the minister that we did not receive the French version of his statement, which assuredly causes us some prejudice. Since there are two official languages in this country, it would be normal that a bilingual copy of ministers' statements should be available to us.

Mr. Speaker, as a result of the minister's statement, it seems to me that Canada is, with regard to the present situation, prisoner of its own production. Caught in an international context of negotiations and agreements on wheat, Canada has had in the way of imaginative trade, over a number of years, nothing to say but to accept this pernicious situation, as it will no doubt continue to do, and to make wheat producers submit to it.

In the meantime, Canadian wheat producers are faced with hardship in one of the richest agricultural countries, especially with regard to wheat.

On the international level, a situation has developed wherein the big wheat exporters have adopted uniform systems and wherein guaranteed prices higher than Canadian prices have been established. Such prices are often much higher than ours, in the case of France for instance, and consequently exports are subsidized and this Canada cannot do. Competition has caused a decrease in prices and Canada has followed suit as always, so as not to destroy competition.

What to my mind is of primary importance, Mr. Speaker, what may be deduced from the minister's trip, and this seems very clear to me, is that we cannot require the Canadian producers to pay for this government's lack of responsibility.

Since 1949, the cost of products and services used by the farmers of western Canada has increased by close to 50 per cent, while the price of wheat is still below the levels of the 1949-50 crop year. That is one factor of the decline in the Canadian wheat trade.

In such circumstances, Mr. Speaker, price decreases like the recent ones which will not be the last apparently, due to the irresponsibility of this government, place on the shoulders of wheat producers a load which they should not be obliged to accept. To conclude my brief remarks, Mr. Speaker, I find most regrettable that the government, with all its commercial imagination, could only come up with the idea of sending the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) check its popularity rating, rather than the quantities of unsold wheat.