

*Supply—Agriculture*

in my own words. I would hate to agree with the minister when he stated in effect that the Canadian economy was travelling in the highest gear possible at this time. I would hate to think that we are going to stand still from now on. In spite of what government is in power, I think Canada has a great future and that it is going to go ahead and not stand still.

He also suggested that if we had had a dry spring or a dry summer last year, the situation would have been far different than it was in relation to wheat and butter, that there might have been a deficit position or a scarcity in the supply of wheat and butter. I was under the impression that the minister was here in Ottawa last May, June and July. But apparently he was just in the city. Never in the history of the Ottawa valley has there been a drier year than last year, practically speaking. That statement applies not only to the Ottawa valley but to practically all of the province of Ontario, and the province of Quebec. Last spring and last summer were practically the driest in history. Yet the minister apparently did not know it or did not realize it. He said that if it had been a dry year last year we would probably have had a deficit in butter. I suggest to him that it did not make much difference to the farmers and apparently it does not make too much difference in their production figures. They now have other means of feeding cattle and are not dependent purely on pasture.

We have heard a considerable amount about the crystal ball, Mr. Chairman. Apparently this is just another case where the ministers and the members on the other side of the house are still gazing into the crystal ball. Few people have any faith in that form of political daydreaming and the conjuring up of mythical pictures. They are too easily beclouded with political expediency.

During the depression years the farmers survived, and in many cases only survived, by living on their capital and allowing their properties to deteriorate practically to the point of destruction. That is the only way they existed. Then, the war came along and the demand for food was increased tremendously. They had very good prospects of recouping some of the money they had lost during the previous years. But what did the government do? They set a ceiling price on all farm products. They froze prices. It was, therefore, impossible for the farmers to recoup during those years. Then, scarcities began to arise and the government was forced into a position of paying subsidies to induce greater production of farm commodities.

[Mr. Charlton.]

At that time the Prime Minister of the day assured farmers across this country that if they would not expect high prices, would not squeeze the last nickel for farm products, they would not suffer after the war. Prices would be sufficient to give the farmers a good income. The farmers across Canada accepted the challenge and produced more than they ever produced in history. They made a handsome contribution to the war effort by working long hours, sometimes under conditions that were not too good. However, the government could not control costs, and what happened? The price-cost position became poorer and poorer, and the net income of the farmer diminished. What did the farmer do? He did what he always does when he arrives at that position: he tried to produce more on the land he was using in order to make up the decrease in income. By hard work and improved methods, yields were increased considerably.

Then, we found we had surpluses. A very small surplus, Mr. Chairman, can cause a great depression in price. Around 1949 I had the privilege of visiting the western provinces. At that time and previous to that time we had been suggesting from this side of the house that we were losing, as a matter of fact, had lost, many of our British markets. This government laughed at us. They did not say we were lying, but they said everything else that meant the same thing. They said it was not true. In the west apparently the Minister of Agriculture and the various cabinet ministers travelling out there had the people believing there was no truth in that statement. Election time came, and you know the results.

The minister was in my home town of Brantford on December 7 of that year. At a meeting there the minister finally admitted what he had known for two years, and he admitted it not in the House of Commons but in a speech at Brantford. The speech was made to the Brantford board of trade on December 7, 1949. The minister said, and I quote:

During the last two years a very decided official effort has been made to drive every one of these products (pork, cheese, beef, eggs, etc.) off the British market. And now that the four-year wheat contract is drawing to a close an effort is being made to drive off a considerable part of our wheat as well.

Before the election, Mr. Chairman, we were called practically every kind of prevaricator for even suggesting that was the case. After the election the minister admits the truth of the situation and then blames officials, apparently, from Great Britain for trying to push these products off