

Agriculture

the people in the agricultural industry are like people in other segments of our economy in that they should have a fair share of the good things of life.

Mr. Speaker, for three or four years I was in western Canada. I think it was in 1969 when the agricultural committee of the House of Commons went to that part of the country. The farmers had on hand approximately one billion bushels of wheat and millions of bushels of other grains. Their complaint was that they did not know what to do with all the grain. If the hon. member for Crowfoot had moved then a motion such as he has moved today, and suggested that the government had failed the agricultural community, many in this chamber would have agreed with him. They would have agreed with him only two years ago when the hog farmers of Canada were starving to death, were being starved out of business—not necessarily, I hasten to add, because of the policies of any one government.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Whicher: I see an hon. member laughing. I am willing to be fair. Many governments on the North American continent did not do their best for hog producers. I am speaking of producers of the United States as well as those raising hogs in Canada. The point is that hog producers could not make a living.

As well, look at the egg situation. Members representing rural areas of Canada know that not long ago farmers were producing eggs which sold at approximately 20 cents a dozen, or less. We all knew then that it took a selling price of 29 cents per dozen for the farmer to break even. Without meaning to laugh at the farmer's expense, the housewife went to Loblaw's, Dominion Stores and Safeways and chuckled to herself as she bought five dozen eggs for a very reasonable price, not realizing that what she was paying for every dozen was hurting the farmer who had to produce those eggs. Mr. Speaker, the farmers of Canada have not been given a fair deal for the past 20 years.

In the last year or so a breath of fresh air has blown over the agricultural industry of Canada. I have often heard people, when talking about the policies of the Liberal Party, the Conservative Party, the NDP or any other party say that the leader of the party represents policy. In the majority of cases such people would have been correct in past years. However, in the last few months a leader has emerged, who is helping the agricultural producers of Canada. I am referring to the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Whelan). He has brought with him a breath of fresh air in enunciating policies affecting the agricultural industry of Canada.

Mr. Knight: What about the minister in charge of the Wheat Board?

Mr. Whicher: Over the years I have heard various ministers of agriculture, provincial as well as federal, straddle the fence, walk along the rail because they did not want to hurt anybody's feelings. The present Minister of Agriculture, and I say this most sincerely, is all for the farmers of Canada. He is for the people of Canada. My Conservative friends should be mighty glad that we have a minister who goes to western Canada and speaks to farmers in that

[Mr. Whicher.]

region. Although people in the past may have disliked the government, they like the policies of the Minister of Agriculture. These policies help hon. members in their capacity as members of parliament, I can assure you.

An hon. Member: You could have done that.

Mr. Whicher: An hon. member across the way says that somebody else could have done that. The fact is, and nobody can deny it, that the Minister of Agriculture has been doing this and in my opinion he deserves all the credit in the world. His policies have been criticized. As I understand it, in plain words he wants us to have good, wholesome food at reasonable prices and he wants a reasonable profit for the farmer. For many years the people of Canada have been getting good and wholesome food. However, "reasonable" does not mean much to some people when it comes to buying food. They do not want reasonable prices; they want food at prices which are cheap, to the detriment of the agricultural industry of Canada. They do not necessarily want the farmer to earn a reasonable profit. They do not give a darn about the farmer's profit so long as they can buy food as cheaply as possible.

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This is one of the reasons why the people of Canada have to pay higher prices for their food today. Because so many farmers have been almost starved out of existence in some instances, we are short of food, if not in Canada in the world at large. Farmers, not just in Canada but in the whole world, have to make a reasonable profit figure so they will produce the food that is so necessary to keep this earth of ours going.

This afternoon the hon. member for Crowfoot said the government has weakened the over-all agricultural industry. It is not generally my policy to read anything, but there was an article on the financial page of this morning's *Globe and Mail* headlined "Very good year is reported for farmers". This is from the latest issue of the Bank of Montreal business review. There is much criticism of banks but generally it is that they do not face facts as far as the business world is concerned. I suggest these figures are true because they are found in agricultural reports across Canada. These facts were reported by the Bank of Montreal only this morning. The article states that farm cash receipts of Canadian farmers improved by 30 per cent in 1972 over 1971. Does that show, as this motion suggests, that the government has weakened the over-all agricultural economy of Canada? The article further states:

A further increase of between 25 and 30 per cent seems in store for this year.

If my Conservative friends—they are my friends, because I sit with them on the agriculture committee and respect every one of them—want to be fair, they may criticize certain areas of agriculture. However, they should admit that the agricultural economy of Canada, for the first time in 25 years, increased by 30 per cent last year and will increase by another 30 per cent this year. Some members who spoke this afternoon have been able to take advantage of that because they are farmers, and good farmers at that. Much criticism can be made. As far as agricultural workers are concerned, this is not heaven. We