

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, May 18, 1971

The House met at 2 p.m.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

JUSTICE AND LEGAL AFFAIRS

Seventh report of Standing Committee on Justice and Legal Affairs—Mr. Tolmie.

[*Editor's Note: For text of above report, see today's Votes and Proceedings.*]

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AGRICULTURE

TABLING OF FINAL REPORT OF ROYAL COMMISSION ON FARM MACHINERY—STATEMENT BY MINISTER

Hon. H. A. Olson (Minister of Agriculture): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to table the final report of the Royal Commission on Farm Machinery in both official languages. This report represents the culmination of five years' study by Dr. Barber and his research staff. The final report presents a very extensive series of recommendations aimed at both federal and provincial governments and the machinery companies themselves. Within the federal government, recommendations fall in the field of responsibility of several departments. For this reason the government has named an interdepartmental committee to consider the recommendations.

As far as those recommendations that lie within the responsibility of the Canada Department of Agriculture are concerned, certain actions have already been taken. These include an increase in the resources allocated to agricultural engineering; emphasis on the evaluation of the machinery in the production system; the development of a proposal designed to assist farm adjustment, and increased operating grants to universities for agricultural engineering purposes. Arrangements are also being concluded for a meeting with representatives of the industry in order to give further consideration to matters of joint interest, including the financing of farm machinery.

In tabling this document the government would welcome the views of all interested groups and individuals and I look forward to receiving these in order that the most useful and most workable policies can be developed.

• (2:10 p.m.)

Mr. R. E. McKinley (Huron): Mr. Speaker, I am sure we are all grateful that Dr. Barber and the members of his commission have at least produced this final version of their report on farm machinery. We certainly hope that some of the recommendations in the report will provide some help to all farmers across Canada who find themselves in a very difficult position because of dimin-

ishing returns and ever-increasing costs of production. I have learned recently that even in Huron County, a normally prosperous agricultural area, some farmers have been unable to pay their electricity bills and consequently their hydro service has been cut off. They are in this plight partly because of the recommendation this government made to the farmers of Canada, when they could not sell their feed grain, to diversify and get into other production. The government ruined the situation for farmers all across Canada. I hope the recommendations stemming from this report will not lead the government to introduce legislation which will create a similar problem for all farmers.

It seems to me to be very plain that there must be something wrong in the farm machinery industry because associations such as the Federation of Agriculture have been importing tractors for two or three years and selling them to farmers at a greatly reduced cost compared with the prices being charged by the regular machinery dealers and large companies. It is high time—and I am very pleased that this report so recommends—that the government and the farm machinery companies of this nation and of the nation across the border get together to find out what is wrong and why our farmers are being gouged in purchasing farm machinery.

I might make a suggestion concerning the financing of farm machinery. Some provinces now subsidize interest rates to a certain extent so that it is easier for farmers to buy the farm machinery they require. I suggest to the government that such a policy might be extended all across Canada so that all farmers in Canada would have an equal opportunity to share in this type of government assistance.

We will look forward to reading the report. I sincerely hope something will come out of it which will help cut the cost of production for farmers and be of benefit to them. We can talk about stabilization of farm income as much as we wish, but if we stabilize the farmer's income at the present level without doing something about increasing his profit the result will be that more farmers will leave their farms and wind up on the welfare rolls of the towns. We know we already have too much of that. It is time the government got busy on a program designed to keep farmers on the farms and prosperous so that they can buy the products produced by the workers in the manufacturing plants and thus bring an end to unemployment. This must be done and the sooner the government gets at it the better.

Mr. Rod Thomson (Battleford-Kindersley): Mr. Speaker, we are quite happy to have the final report of the Barber Commission before us. It has been so long since the commission was appointed that some farmers will almost be old men before they even hear what is contained in the report, let alone react to it. We look for-