

Agricultural Prices Support Act

Mr. Argue: Is the minister going to make a statement?

Mr. Gardiner: Mr. Speaker, I am quite prepared to make a statement now, but it would not cover everything we will want to discuss.

This act was passed in the session of 1944. It provided for the placing of support prices under staple agricultural products, during the transitional period. There was also a provision in the act requiring that it be extended from time to time if it was going to be applied. In other words, it was not permanent legislation. It has already been announced that the legislation will be made permanent during this session. The simplest way to do that would be to take out the provision which made it necessary to extend the act from time to time. The act would then be in exactly the same position as most acts passed by this parliament; that is, it would continue in effect so long as the parliament of Canada did not take any further action.

There has been considerable discussion as to the intentions of the old act, and I do not think I could do better this afternoon than read what I placed on the record on July 29, 1944, as to the intentions of the act. We have operated under the act on that basis up to the present time. I should like to quote from page 5611 of *Hansard* of July 29, 1944, where I am reported as follows:

That is another reason why the bill is applied to the transitional period. That does not mean that when the transitional period is up, any government which happens to be in power at that time is in duty bound to do away with the legislation in its entirety, that it will have no right to amend that legislation in any way. Of course, any house that may be here at any time after the war has the right to amend the measure in any way it may see fit. But this particular bill is for the purpose of dealing with a situation that does exist, as it exists, during the transitional period between war and peace. I hope that our markets for farm products for a period of years, possibly two or three or more, for most of our products, will be sufficiently good that we shall be able to obtain a price which is comparable with the price we are now obtaining for our farm products of different kinds. If so, the board that is in existence during that period of time will be keeping a check on what is happening during that period, comparing it with what happened during the war period; and immediately there is any necessity for taking action in connection with any farm product, authority is given the board under this legislation to purchase a surplus of that farm product at the floor price which the government of the day considers to be a reasonable floor in the light of all the facts existing in connection with the case.

I am asked what will they do with all that; will they get rid of it?

That is, all the surpluses.

I can assure hon. members that if I am minister charged with the task, there will not be any of it that will be burned or dumped into the ocean or into the lake. One thing has been demonstrated

to us during the war, and as a matter of fact we have always known it. We have always known that there are areas in the world where there are famines from time to time. There are areas where great masses of the population are never properly fed, and there has never been a time when it would not have been possible to take all the food commodities of Canada and send them to some place where someone could have made use of them. Unfortunately, in the past we have kept our actions of that kind limited pretty much to the people that we know most about. But we are entering upon a period when one can leave his home in any part of the world and be in any other part of the world in which he wishes to land some time within the next twenty-four or forty-eight hours. Therefore the radius of our activities and our friendships and all that kind of thing will be very much wider when this war is over than they have ever been before. I am not worrying about finding some place where we can put the surplus food of a country that has only twelve million people in it to start with.

Then we went to dinner, and during the interval I prepared a statement which I read to the house when I came back at eight o'clock. This is the statement, to be found at page 5612 of *Hansard* for July 29, 1944:

Before the dinner recess I was dealing with some of the points that were suggested by hon. members opposite, particularly the questions raised by the hon. member for Lake Centre and the hon. member for Lethbridge. Perhaps I can best sum up the answers I should like to give to those questions by saying that it would not be fair to the farmers of Canada to do certain things in the transition period. First, I should say it would not be fair to order them, immediately the war is over, to reduce production to the level at which it is certain the commodities could be sold at a given price. I was asked what we were going to do, provided that we had great surpluses, and I call attention to what I have just stated as an answer to that question, and to repeat what I said just before the dinner recess.

During this war period we have been asked to increase production to the limit in order to provide food to those of our allies who require it, as well as to our own people. I repeat that it would be unfair to the farmers, immediately the war is over, to say they must reduce their production to the point where everything they produce can be disposed of at a given price. And I would state that this bill contains provision for dealing with the situation where a given price is essential for uncontrolled production during the transition period.

Then I should say it would be unfair to the farmer immediately to require him to sell at the cost of production, without considering at all any losses he sustained because of the war or any returns he was denied through the controls established during the war. The suggestion was made that farmers had been denied returns in the earlier part of the war and that just at the time when in the ordinary course of events, according to the experiences of the last war, he would have reaped some returns which would have been helpful to him, ceilings were placed upon prices, as a result of which he was denied as great a return as otherwise he might have received. All those matters would have to be taken into consideration during the transition period along the lines I have suggested.

Then, too, I should say it would be unfair to hold that because a farmer had an exceptionally good crop during the transition period he should be prepared to accept a low return per unit, and I make that statement also based upon what I said