

Free Trade Arguments based on false premises

Two political parties have placed "free agricultural implements" in their platform and I come before you on the defensive, for reasons to be touched upon later. I admit that there is a considerable public opinion, particularly among the farmers of Western Canada, in favour of free trade in farm implements but I submit, and will endeavor to prove, that this opinion has been based upon false premises, due to a political and newspaper campaign over the last fifteen years, or more, which has systematically misrepresented the position of the agricultural implement makers of this country. So persistent have been the false statements made that they have long ago been accepted by a large number of people as facts. We have not endeavored in the past, to any large extent, to meet the allegations sown broadcast, because, in the first place, they seemed too grotesque to be accepted by any large number of people, and in the second place, the agencies spreading them were too numerous for us to hope to offset the effect of their propaganda. It is evident, however, that a very large number of people accept anything that is printed as having at least some basis of fact.

The most plausible of the charges which have been freely made are as follows:—

First, it is said that Canadian Implement Companies sold their goods abroad at lower prices than at home.

Second, totally misleading comparisons have been made between the price of implements in the United States and in Canada.

Third, foreign and domestic drawbacks have been described as bonuses to Canadian implement firms.

Before dealing with these questions, I wish to say that many politicians and many journals who have circulated these stories have had indisputable evidence placed in their hands as to the inaccuracy of their statements; but, I am sorry to say, they were unfair enough to prefer to make their point rather than let the truth be known. In this they take the position of a Senator in the United States whom a friend of mine heard state at a political gathering of farmers that a large implement firm in the United States sold its machines at prices in Russia so far below the prices in the United States that farmers would make money to buy them there and pay the freight back. My friend, who was an implement man, who knew the facts and who knew the Senator, saw him after the meeting and told him he was sorry to hear him make a statement so far from the truth and gave him the facts of the matter. The Senator simply said—"That's all right, old man. You know the implement business and how to make the most out