Agricultural Products Board

From the statement made by the minister it seems clear that this board, if directed so to do by order in council, may do almost anything in the way of buying, processing and marketing of agricultural products. The minister said the board might be used as an agency to carry out the purposes of the Agricultural Prices Support Act. A board of this nature, said the minister, could be used upon the request of a government of another country, such as the government of Great Britain, for the procurement of agricultural products within Canada. The minister said, pointing out a third activity the board might take, that if it were found advisable it might buy food here in Canada for any purpose. It is clear therefore that the possible scope of the board's activities is great indeed.

Once again however there is a serious fault, a fault that runs right through legislation which has been presented by the Minister of Agriculture over the years dealing with the marketing of agricultural products. Once again there is no guarantee that the price support which is set will in fact cover the farmers' cost of production. There is nothing in this measure, as outlined by the minister, to guarantee to agricultural producers in Canada a fair share of the national income or a reasonable standard of living.

If we are to judge the likely effect of this measure by steps taken by the government in the past in the same field, then I am afraid we will once again find floor prices set too low, with a consequent dwindling effect on agricultural production. What the farmers of Canada want and what they have a right to demand is that the government introduce legislation in which the formula is spelled out and in which, in clear and concise terms, the farmers are given a real guarantee that, year in and year out, floor prices will be adequate.

As I have already said, the minister mentioned that a measure of this kind might be used, if the agricultural products board was directed in council, to buy up Canadian agricultural products to supply to countries such as Great Britain. I am afraid that in the present state of international affairs, and the announcement by the government of the United Kingdom that they would endeavour to save a billion dollars in the purchase of commodities in the dollar area, the chances of this measure being used to increase our exports of agricultural products to Great Britain are indeed limited.

I was pleased to hear the Prime Minister (Mr. St. Laurent) announce earlier today that Mr. Churchill, the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, would pay a visit to Canada in the early part of January of next year. I suggest to the Minister of Agriculture that he discuss with the Prime Minister of Great Britain not only the necessity of there being no reduction in the purchase of agricultural goods in Canada, but that the minister discuss with the Prime Minister of Great Britain ways and means of increasing the supply of agricultural products to the United Kingdom.

In the past the minister has said many times that he believes the United Kingdom is Canada's best permanent market, outside our own country. I agree with that statement. And so I suggest that the government do everything possible to see that that market is increased. I would like to see the Minister of Agriculture call a conference and invite to that conference members of farm organizations and of co-operatives. If we are to increase our sales of agricultural products in Britain, then I think it follows that Britain must have an increased supply of Canadian dollars. The British have a fine farm machinery industry, and I believe there is a potential market in Canada for large quantities of British-made agricultural machinery. Therefore I suggest that the minister discuss with farm organizations the possibility of obtaining and handling on a permanent basis large quantities of British agricultural machinery. I suggest that he discuss this matter with Mr. Churchill, when he visits Canada early in January, to see if something cannot be done not only to prevent a reduction in agricultural goods going from Canada to the United Kingdom, but with a view to increasing substantially Canadian exports to Great Britain.

In the last day or so I have reviewed support prices at present in effect in Canada. Hogs are supported at $32.50 per hundredweight f.o.b. Halifax, basis Wiltshire sides. Well, as the hon. member for Selkirk (Mr. Bryce) said yesterday, a Wiltshire side is not a hog; and when the farmer gets paid he knows very well that the hog is a long way from the Wiltshire side; because the price he has received in the last few months is a long way from the support price he had expected. A price of $32.50 a hundredweight at Halifax amounts to only $30.35 for a grade A hog at Regina on the basis of a Wiltshire side, and so far as the price that the farmer receives for that hog is concerned it is estimated to be in the neighbourhood of $26.50 per hundredweight dressed weight. The table placed on *Hansard* yesterday by the hon. member for Selkirk demonstrates very well what needs to be done in a measure like this to guarantee the hog industry in Canada more stability. I ask the minister if there is any incentive for a farmer to raise hogs when he sees the price of hogs drop