

Supply—Agriculture

With these remarks I shall conclude for the moment my observations on the agricultural estimates.

Mr. Regier: Mr. Chairman, I was very interested in the remarks of the previous speaker. I noted that at the opening of his remarks he was rather political in what he had to say. He regretted—and I use his own words—that the Saskatchewan government appeared most reluctant to co-operate in the legislation dealing with crop insurance. He also announced with considerable flourish that in Manitoba this was working very effectively indeed.

I believe that no province has yet had any experience with crop insurance and I do not completely appreciate how he can depreciate his own province in comparison with another when we consider that no province has yet had any real experience with crop insurance.

As I understand it, the Saskatchewan government is most reluctant regarding this scheme because of the heavy costs that have to be borne by the provincial government and the individual farmers concerned. In my opinion Saskatchewan is doing nothing less than its duty, and that is to protect the interests of the provincial treasury and the interests of the individual farmers concerned.

The hon. member for Moose Jaw-Lake Centre also expressed the opinion that those engaged in agriculture in his constituency were very, very pleased—and these were his words—with existing legislation in connection with agriculture. I believe the hon. member should get outside the bounds of the city of Moose Jaw and visit a number of farmers in his riding. I believe that if he talked to the rank and file of the farmers of his riding he would feel that they were anything but very, very pleased with legislation concerning agricultural matters as it affects them.

Before we carry item 1, which is the main item and involves the salary of the minister, I should like the minister to explain to the committee and the nation why we cannot have parity prices for Canadian agriculture. Why cannot Canadian farmers who are producing those things that are consumed within Canada have the same rights as organized labour to sit across the bargaining table, perhaps with the Canadian association of consumers and the government acting as referee, and determine a price level in order to give them parity of income with all other workers of our nation?

I know this condition prevails wherever Canadian agriculture is adequately organized. This particular condition prevails in most of the major urban areas of Canada for our milk producers who market in those areas.

We have milk boards in most of the major cities of Canada; we have milk boards in most of the provinces of Canada, and when the milk producers feel they are not getting a fair deal they argue their case of rising costs or otherwise before the milk board and obtain a certain degree of equity.

Why cannot all segments of agriculture be organized in a similar way? What is the government going to do in order to help other segments of Canadian agriculture obtain at least the limited amount of equity that Canadian producers of fluid milk in the urban markets have obtained for themselves in most of our major metropolitan areas?

Our wheat farmers have a long history in this connection. I believe their history is some 80 years in length; 80 long years of organization, fighting and bitter struggle. Our wheat farmers have at least obtained orderly marketing in Canada. Why cannot other agricultural producers obtain an equal amount of equity? Why can we not have parity prices for those products that are consumed within Canada, and deficiency payments for those products that must be exported?

I see nothing wrong with the two price system for wheat. I see nothing wrong with Canadian producers of wheat being granted equity in connection with wheat consumed within Canada, and in order to give them parity of income why should they not be granted deficiency payments because of the fact that world prices may be lower than called for by parity of income calls?

I hope the minister will explain why the government has deserted and, I regret to say, persuaded many leading agricultural spokesmen of Canada to desert the basic principle of parity of income for Canadian agriculture. I am heartbroken when I have to attend a meeting of organized agriculture and realize that organized agriculture takes a penny today rather than a pound tomorrow and bows down to political expediency rather than obtaining equity and a fair, square deal. Organized agriculture kowtows to political partisanship rather than insisting on the fundamental and basic rights of the man who tills the soil.

If we can have parity of income for the fluid milk producers of Canada—and I hope we are getting near to having this for the wheat producers of Canada—why can we not have it for the potato grower, for the small fruit grower and the tree fruit grower? Why must potatoes be imported into Canada when we are able to produce potatoes at an economical price? This reflects a lack of planning and of organization. Why should strawberries be dumped on our market to the ruin of our own berry producers?