

Agricultural Stabilization Act

Take apples—on November 9 the Board was authorized to make certain payments after the apples had been grown. Here is another order with respect to carrots dated December 21. Mr. Speaker, who raises carrots in the middle of winter unless it is in a hothouse? And so it goes. The price is always announced after the grower is committed.

If this legislation is to be used to encourage farm production, the department knows months in advance what the average will be, so tell the producer what price is to be paid by making it a forward price—it will not be of much help, but it will help a little.

On this subject of forward pricing let me elucidate in connection with a modern policy of inducement to production. Having heard the speeches made by the minister, farmers were expecting that this legislation would provide an income guarantee. They expected it would be something along the lines of what has been done in British Columbia, or what Ontario and Quebec are thinking of doing, that is to say, giving the farmer the benefit or the promise of a guaranteed income. But all the farmer gets from this bill is a guarantee that if he raises one of a certain group of commodities he will get 90 per cent of a five-year price average and that, if the provinces or producers want to contribute, a little more can be added to the guaranteed price.

What I am pointing out is that if the minister wants farmers to produce, more than this needs to be done. There has to be an incomes policy, and this is not an incomes policy. An effort is going on to provide an incomes policy for the grain farmers on the prairies, but there is nothing for the other poor slob who happen to live outside the prairies. We need to insist in the committee that prices must be announced before the production season begins. This was the original philosophy behind the bill, but it has been ignored throughout in the course of the administration of the act. In the case of products whose prices are subject to violent fluctuations, I am thinking, for example, of fruit and vegetables, the answer will not lie in this legislation at all but possibly in some sort of marketing organization which will be prepared at a moment's notice to buy these products and put them into people's stomachs.

To get back to this question of forward pricing, let us look at it realistically. If we examine farm income in the various provinces in the last four or five years we find there are only three provinces where, after a farmer has covered the costs of his operation, looked after interest on investment, and set aside \$3,000 or \$4,000 for wages and management, there is any money left over. I am referring to the three prairie provinces where a large proportion of the production consists of grain.

The Ontario farmer is the most efficient in the world, yet all he is doing is running at high speed and remaining in the same place. To assure him he will get the average of prices over the last five years will do nothing to induce him to produce more. In the maritimes, farmers are running too, but they are not even staying in the same place; they are going backwards. In Quebec, with its tremendous agricultural potential, they are going downhill.

The only thing that has saved the prairie province in the last two years is that, thanks to the Minister of Justice (Mr. Lang), we had no grain to sell, prices went up to the

[Mr. Hamilton (Qu'Appelle-Moose Mountain).]

roof and for once we got ahead of our costs. Today, though, the grain farmer is as naked as a jaybird. He knows there is no international convention governing prices. He knows there is no floor price available to him, and that if there should happen to be one or two million extra tons of bread grain available in the world, prices will fall as quickly as they rose and then the only thing he will be able to do is go to the poor house in high gear, for which he is well equipped.

If we were completely open in our approach to this legislation we would acknowledge that it is only part of a package. No financial institution wants to lend, say, \$100,000 to assist a farm operation unless it has a good idea what the annual income is likely to be. Legislation such as this has a part to play, but it will not solve all the problems of farm income; it will not send farmers roaring into the fields to plant next spring, or roaring out to breed their stock when they know that a price based on a five-year average will not meet costs of production. There has to be a new and imaginative starting place, and on the basis of average prices in the last five years the government is not going to get much action.

I hope, I have explained with sufficient clarity the part this legislation plays in the overall scheme of things. I hope, I have made it clear that forward pricing should be put back into the legislation. I hope, the minister will seize the bull by the horns and agree that this should be started on a new basis. Having got that clearly in mind, let us also have clarity of thinking about what we have to do to give the farmer stability of income.

● (2040)

I should like to ask the minister, in a rhetorical way, to examine the speeches made by the hon. member from the Okanagan and the hon. member from New Brunswick who spoke of problems in their areas. These members represent two different extremes of the country, two types of product—fruit and vegetables—in regard to which there has never been justice from the legislation over the years. Let us see whether we can come up with a program on the marketing side that will give them some hope for the future.

I should like to conclude my remarks with this main thrust. My party will support this legislation. It will try to amend it, never pretending that it is going to cure all of the problems of the farmers. But this party wants the minister not to betray the faith that the people of Canada have in him. He will be different from his predecessors if he does something other than talk. If the minister would get rid of some of the people who surround him, and who publish one speech after another that should make us ashamed that we ever became connected with agriculture, he will be able to rest his jaw and let his brains catch up.

What I am trying to say is that we want action. We are willing to be co-operative. But one of the techniques that the advisers use in taking over a minister is to give the minister so many speaking engagements that he has no time to think. I say to this minister, take time off to think. The members on this side of the House may be called Conservatives but they are not evil men, and I say the same of all members of the House. There must be some good in everybody. I have learned from experience to