

Farm Credit Act

I would not like to forget, but I cannot name them for lack of time. I know that the figures I just quoted will convince them that they should stop criticizing when they speak of the Conservative government. I suggest that they should face the facts, which will enable them to see that the Conservative government did a lot for the farming class. Moreover, I suggest to the Minister of Agriculture to do only half that much, and he will have done a lot for farmers during his term of office, because if we believe what farmers say, he will not be there very long.

[Text]

Mr. D. M. Fisher (Port Arthur): Mr. Speaker, it would be unnatural for me to take too much time, when I do not come from a primarily agricultural constituency and I see such proponents of the sturdy rural yeomen as the hon. member for Essex South (Mr. Whelan) and the hon. member for Northumberland (Miss Jewett) waiting to speak. The minister has been congratulated on all sides; the hon. member for Kootenay West (Mr. Herridge) congratulated him for extending socialism; the Conservatives have been congratulating him for pushing on with the legislation they are so proud of; the congratulations that have been flowing from his own benches have been pretty hard to identify, other than I suppose you would just say they are part of the great man syndrome. I have been trying to think of some way in which I could congratulate him, and the only thing I could come up with was not very relevant to this bill. This is the question of flying around the country with a bunch of M.P.'s. I think it is very good for any minister of the crown to accept such a responsibility in view of the general stigma that attaches to M.P.'s these days, and I think the minister is very brave, if not for bringing in this bill, at least for suggesting he is prepared to go and stump the brushes and brakes of Canada with a group of M.P.'s. This is a real contribution he has put into the raising of the parliamentary prestige.

The only point I wanted to make, Mr. Speaker, is something that I cannot really see very clearly from the introduction the minister made when he indicated that this legislation was just a part of a much larger farm credit story that is being approached by an interdepartmental committee, and he mentioned ARDA. I happen to live in a region where there are very few farms of substance, except those that have some relationship to a pulpwood cutting operation. The plain fact of the matter is that the ARDA program

[Mr. Ricard.]

which the minister threw in as providing some means of credit facilities is just not functioning in most of the country, and where it does function it always seems to be within a municipality or a regional framework that really does not open up the opportunities that this act does for an individual farmer, for example, who wants to acquire more forestry land or wants to turn some of his forestry land, by some fairly substantial expenditures, into a genuine tree farm with some prospects of developing a rotation pattern, and so on.

I would like to ask the minister why the definition that is contained in the act is not a bit more expansive, and whether he could give any indication of whether this act could be expanded just a little bit more broadly in its terms so that in those areas where farming shades into forestry, such as the area I happen to represent, there could be a greater opportunity to get credit.

I raise this point because there are many cases in my area of men getting most of their cash income from pulpwood cutting, either off their own property or from other contracts on crown lands, and they have not been able to get loans very easily under the act, partly because the equity they hold in value terms in their partly cleared forest holdings is too low. Since the ARDA program is still not extended in a national way to provide assistance to them, they have had substantial difficulties in getting the funds they require to enable them to branch out and extend this kind of odd mixed farming.

I gather from some of the remarks made by certain hon. members from Quebec that the problem in their province is not dissimilar to mine. Here again you have fringe or hinterland agriculture which badly needs credit. Yet in this legislation before us there does not seem to be any specific direction to the legislation, particularly in the definition given in the act; and I will not abuse your chairmanship, Mr. Speaker, by reading it. However, it is obvious that the definition of farming which obtains in this act is not the broad one which would include tree farming, or what we call pulpwood farming. Yet that is the real substance of agriculture in our area.

I want to put to the minister one of the reasons why I think an easier approach is necessary here. A great deal of the forested land in the region I represent not held by the crown is being bought up by successful men in the main, particularly doctors, dentists, and small entrepreneurs who have been successful.