

Agricultural Products Act

Mr. Wright: Yes, I am coming to that. But this is what I want to point out. This year our farm expenses are \$1,092 million, which is more than our gross farm income was for thirteen out of the last twenty-five years. As farmers, we know that when these expenses go up, they do not go down as quickly as do the prices of the things we have to sell. That is one reason why the farmers of this country feel nervous at this time. Their expenses have gone up. When the war was over in 1945 the ceilings were taken off, and the cost of everything we have to buy has gone up to such a point that today we are in the position that, if prices drop, we shall be in an extremely serious situation indeed.

Of course we have floor-price legislation, the minister said. But that floor-price legislation has no formula in it as to what those floor prices will be. When a serious position obtains with regard to any particular agricultural product, nobody knows what the floor will be that the minister may see fit to put under that product.

An hon. Member: Or not at all.

Mr. Wright: I think in some cases they will put some floor there; whether that floor is at a level that will give us our expenses or whether it is down in the cellar, no one can tell. Certainly there is no formula in our present floor-price legislation to suggest where it will be. We have a floor price under coarse grains. It is 61½ cents a bushel on oats and 90 cents a bushel on barley. Those floors are out of line with what we are selling wheat for today. What will be the result of that? The result undoubtedly will be that in western Canada in this crop year we shall have a much too large acreage placed in wheat because of the difference there is between the present floors on coarse grains and the price of wheat. This year we have no floor under either rape or flax. The result will be that there will be little of those crops sown. It is only natural that the farmers will not sow those crops when they know there is a surplus of them already in hand, and that there is no floor under them.

One of the ministers stated today that we did not have many surpluses in Canada. In reply I would say that we have a surplus of quite a few products in Canada. We have a surplus of flax, rapeseed, salmon, apples, honey and other kinds of fish besides salmon. There are quite a few things that we are coming into a surplus position on in Canada today. As a means of finding markets for them, I say that this legislation is entirely inadequate. We in this group will support this bill because it at least does something. But as far as we are concerned, it is not a

[Mr. Gardiner.]

satisfactory piece of legislation with which to meet the needs of the farmers in this country at this time.

Mr. John T. Hackett (Stanstead): Mr. Speaker, a great deal has been said about this type of legislation. For a moment I should like to say to the hon. member for Melfort (Mr. Wright) that I am not debating whether or not relief should be granted to the class he represents so acceptably in the House of Commons. The point to which I wish to direct attention, and it is one which is becoming a little threadbare, I admit, is disrespect for the constitution.

Mr. Williams: Not threadbare; it is naked.

Mr. Hackett: Hon. gentlemen are entitled to their points of view. But sometimes I think if they knew a little more about the subject matter of the debate they would not be quite so glib in their comments. I listen with great respect to gentlemen who speak of matters concerning which they have knowledge. I listen with patience to other gentlemen who claim unpossessed knowledge even though I cannot take their comments seriously.

I was about to inform the hon. member for Melfort that I am not going to debate the desirability of fixed prices on farm produce. I merely say that in the submission of some of us on this side of the house the method of doing it chosen by the government is entirely wrong. And while I talk about method, I am going to ask the hon. member for Melfort not to be impatient, because if this type of legislation be tolerated, then it will work a hardship on the whole people.

As a people we believe in honest dealings. We believe in the sanctity of contracts. We all believe that. Now, the constitution is a document in which has been set forth the understanding of our forefathers; and had not that understanding assumed its present form there could have been no Canada, no confederation.

Those gentlemen in the years preceding 1867 were not mere dreamers; they were not visionaries; they were not given to speculation. They were men of affairs, men of experience, trained in the hard facts of life. They entered into an agreement that they would come together in a union upon the condition that certain powers should be wielded by the provinces, certain powers by the dominion, and that certain rights should vest in the individual.

I believe we all admit that. Now, what has happened? We are asked to depart from that understanding, disrespect the agreement. The right hon. the Minister of Agriculture, to whom I always listen with intense interest