

War Appropriation—Mr. Nicholson

I notice that the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Gardiner) bearded the lion in his den by attending in London a meeting of indignant Ontario farmers. The London *Free Press* dispatch states that Mr. McEwing, the member of the legislative assembly for the constituency of North Wellington, asked if the federal government would recognize that pork was being produced at a loss, and would be prepared to give the producer the same consideration industry was receiving. The minister replied he was unable to say what the attitude of his government would be.

I must confess I was embarrassed to learn from the newspaper report that a minister of this house in a public meeting should have had to listen to some of the comments recorded in the press. One indignant farmer asked, after the minister had indicated that he owned a farm near London, whether he owned a pair of overalls. It would seem to me that comments of that kind would indicate that we have a great deal of dissatisfaction among a loyal group of people in Canada who are prepared to make every reasonable sacrifice.

This appropriation of \$1,300,000,000 should include sufficient funds to carry on agriculture efficiently, so that it may fulfil its proper place in the economy of Canada.

Just one more reference, to indicate that my observation need not be confined to Saskatchewan or even to Ontario. At the conference which ended so suddenly last month, Mr. Bracken spoke concerning the position of agriculture. The report of his speech, as it appears at page 31 of the report of the plenary session held on January 14, 1941, contains the following:

But what is the situation facing agriculture? In the west we harvested last year one of the largest wheat crops in our history. When it is all sold it will have brought to the farmers a little more than half as much as each of several smaller crops before the depression, and not until the end of next July will farmers have received payment for the last of it. That crop brought the producers a little over 50 cents per bushel on the farm. During the last war, such a crop would have moved readily overseas and farmers would have received in some years three or four times the present market price per bushel. Even in the post-war period before the depression the farm price paid was more than twice the present price. It is now suggested in certain quarters that only a portion of our next year's crop be allowed to find a market through the ordinary channels.

And again:

Since the war started, there has been a worsening of the farmer's market condition for certain of his major commodities, with some improvement and limited possibilities for certain other products. Disparities between the rising cost of goods the farmer buys and the fixed

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prices for certain of the products he sells are perpetuating a most difficult situation and giving rise to protest and unrest, the causes for which in war time at least we should by all means seek to alleviate or avoid.

With the evidence coming from such a wide field, I submit that the government should consider its responsibility to agriculture in the present crisis. If there are men engaged in agriculture whose services could be used to better advantage in industry, now is the time for the government to give us that information. I am sure that hon. members from all parts of Canada have had farmers appealing to them for information and instruction as to where they might make their greatest contribution in the present crisis. Until the government states that there are too many people on our farms, until it intimates that it intends to move large groups of agricultural workers to industry, I am sure we shall have a great deal of discontent.

The announcement has been made that relief is to be cut off in the near future. This will add greatly to the unrest which exists in many parts of Canada. If I might refer again to Saskatchewan, I think I can say that hon. members realize that the problems facing that province are not the result of carelessness on the part of the people, but rather they are due to a national calamity and national policies. We have large surpluses of many commodities, and now the government announces that it intends to embark upon a policy of cutting off food from large numbers of our citizens. I submit that if the policy as announced is carried out, a large number of people in Saskatchewan will find it impossible to secure the food they require in their daily lives. I have in my hand a copy of a speech delivered by Mr. Perkins, president of the federal surplus commodities corporation in the United States. He shows how we in Canada might dispose of much of our surpluses. The information available indicates that we have a large group in Canada who are not consuming enough food. If we are to maintain a standard of life which will ensure that certain people will be able to make their greatest contribution in our war effort, those people should have sufficient food. This report states:

According to this study, the 14 per cent of our families with the lowest incomes, that is, families receiving \$312 on the average, are spending only slightly more than \$1 per person per week for food (actually, in order to keep going, they spend about 50 per cent more for all purposes than they earned—some merchant got stuck for part of the difference).

And again:

In other words, this tells us that people with incomes of under \$500 a year have about five