

*Grain*

For years farmers have been faced with ever increasing production costs and a continual decline in the selling price of the goods which they had to sell. Again, Mr. Speaker, I was very much interested in the remarks of the former minister of agriculture this afternoon. He pointed out that the previous administration had spent millions of dollars to aid agriculture. It is true that the previous administration passed the Agricultural Prices Support Act in 1944. However, Mr. Speaker, in the first ten years of its operation it cost the people of Canada 15c. per person per year to support the price of agricultural goods right across Canada, a huge amount of money in the eyes of the former minister of agriculture, but certainly a meagre sum to those who received the benefits of that act.

Farm organizations right across Canada have constantly brought this situation to the attention, not only of the previous administration but of the public at large, with little or no apparent effect until recently. I would say that the passage of this legislation should be looked upon as a major victory for the farm organizations and those so active in presenting their views during the last few years. It is to be hoped that the forecast long-range plan to stabilize the agricultural industry will soon be brought before us for consideration. The need for this particular legislation has been recognized by all parties and by practically every member in this house.

The interprovincial farm union council, in its brief which was presented to the government on August 15 of this year, advanced many strong arguments as to why something must be done to improve the position of those engaged in agriculture. They point out that in the last 18 months agricultural production costs have risen 16.7 per cent, that the retail price of bread has increased 2 cents per pound, that the price of wheat has decreased by 23 cents per bushel; that the interest rates on loans to the Canadian wheat board have increased; that the increase in the value of the Canadian dollar has had an adverse effect upon the farmers of Canada.

We of this group are not prepared to admit that there is an actual surplus of our agricultural products at the present time, including even wheat. I believe the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations pointed out last year that we had in the world at that time only a three months supply of wheat for our wheat consuming population. This amount should not be classed as a surplus. I am sure there is not one farmer in Canada today who would like to think in terms of having only a three months supply of food on hand for his

[Mr. Smith (Battle River-Camrose).]

stock. The fault lies partially in the fact that the marketing policies which the previous administration followed were definitely faulty, and instead of being able to get our grain to the hungry people throughout the world the farmers of western Canada were called upon to finance practically the whole burden of this unneeded surplus.

This legislation will provide a measure of relief but we do hope that the new government will adopt trading policies which will enable our producers to sell their goods at a reasonable price. We recognize that all cannot be changed overnight but we suggest to the government that it is not fair to expect the farmers of western Canada to finance any great portion of this surplus. It is for this reason that we of this group have constantly emphasized the need for the establishment of government-owned terminal elevators throughout the west.

The box car situation in the west remains one of confusion. The quota position throughout my area is worse today than it was a year ago. It is all very well for government spokesmen to point out that export sales are up, but to the average farmer that means very little. He still sees his granaries full of wheat. He is still forced to build new ones to accommodate this year's crop. He is still forced to accept his income in a bit now and a bit later process. I submit that there is no wage earning group in Canada today which would be pleased or happy to receive its salary on the instalment plan, and that is exactly what the farmer of western Canada has been forced to do for years. The farmers are constantly plagued with unpaid bills and are always short of cash. These are realities, and unless we want a complete collapse in our grain-growing industry immediate and definite steps must be taken.

I was very sorry to hear the Minister of Transport (Mr. Hees) state in reply to a question of mine the other day that the government had not seen fit to re-establish the position of transport controller. We have argued in the house for some years now that there was need of a transport controller, a person charged with the responsibility of seeing that there was an equitable distribution of box cars in the west at all times; and not only charged with the responsibility of seeing that this happened but given the authority to carry out his responsibility. I feel we can look forward to another crop year of confusion as far as the box car situation is concerned.

Many people across Canada are of the opinion that the farmer is getting something