

Rural Development

Act. I did wonder what was involved in the change.

The minister explained that the purpose is to cover certain fields of agriculture. But in my opinion, the previous act covered all fields of agriculture and all agricultural areas. In the past, this act has not only been applied to agricultural lands in designated areas, but even to crown lands and here and there.

That is why it seems to me, at first sight, that if it were only to extend the act, the original one had ample scope. But if it is for another reason, as the minister mentioned—justice—then I do not have to wonder any longer about the why and wherefore of this piece of legislation. But I do not think this is done with a view to playing politics and taking up the time of the house merely for a change in name. That is why we accept, on principle, these changes of name particularly if the abbreviation ARDA is retained because—the minister is well aware of this—the Agricultural Rehabilitation and Development Act is never mentioned in our area, only ARDA. It is known under that name and I am very happy that the minister should have moved an amendment to retain this abbreviation.

I have noted something else in this bill, and I should like to bring this to the attention of the minister tonight.

A very close perusal of the amended legislation reveals that something apparently very simple is being presented, but this may affect the provinces and affect them disastrously.

● (8:20 p.m.)

I remember discussing with the minister and putting questions to him on the administration of the former ARDA legislation. I was always told the provinces made the decisions and brought forth the projects. In fact, the provinces were supplying the spark. Unless they went along, ARDA could not be implemented in any province. Is that still the case?

What surprises me is that the bill says:

The minister may cause to be prepared and undertaken, directly—

The “to be undertaken directly” scares me.

I heard that this also existed in the past. You always keep a little of the federative spirit. The minister attended the last conference in Quebec where co-operative federalism was discussed and I think, or rather I am afraid—I do not want to make any rash judgment—he came back with this spirit of federalism which is always used against the provinces, especially the province of Quebec.

The former act took away from the provinces any autonomy they had in the field of agriculture. Now the Quebec autonomy will no longer be protected.

When the minister takes the floor, I will deal with this matter which is most treacherous. When the federal government is empowered to impose something on a province, I do not know if you call it co-operative-federalism, but I call it centralization. And we are against centralization. That is what I wanted to point out to the minister.

Some hon. members may laugh, but I believe that under this section the federal minister could take action without the consent of the provinces.

Mr. Côté (Longueuil): Where?

Mr. Gauthier: Under ARDA. Look at section 2 (2).

Mr. Côté (Longueuil): Keep on reading.

Mr. Gauthier:

(2) the minister may cause to be prepared or undertaken, directly or in co-operation—

Mr. Côté (Longueuil): What can he cause to be undertaken?

Mr. Gauthier:

—with the government of any province—

Mr. Côté (Longueuil): What can he cause to be undertaken?

Mr. Gauthier:

—with the government of any province or agency thereof, programmes of research and investigation respecting the more effective use and economic development of rural lands in that province.

He may cause to be undertaken various works and studies.

Mr. Côté (Longueuil): Research programs.

Mr. Gauthier: This is the very point to which I want to draw your attention. First they take an inch of land, then a foot, a mile, two miles. If programs of research and investigation are to be undertaken, as they were in Gaspé, the decision is taken by the federal government. That is precisely what we do not want.

If there is research to be done, let the provinces come to an agreement with the minister on the joint programs.

My fear may be unfounded. I put the case to the minister; I am sure he has explanations to give us. But if we do not speak out, things will remain as they are and everyone will remain in the dark.