

Employment Support Bill

Then, Mr. Turner pointed out another very important matter, namely that the structure of farming and fishing in most instances is different from that which we encounter in dealing with other industries in Canada. In his letter to the Prime Minister he said:

... but the net effect of under-employment of labour and under-utilization of other production resources because of the surtax could have a severe effect on the individual producer of certain commodities.

Then, he pointed out further that farmers are self-employed, as are many fishermen, and therefore are in a different position from those in some other industries. Mr. Turner went on to point out he was happy to note that at least the government was prepared to accept the principle that the government has an obligation to help industry in Canada when it faces problems such as are being faced at the present time. Certainly, if that principle is to be accepted, then the case for helping agricultural producers and fishermen is as good or better than that for helping any other sector of the Canadian economy. I think it must also be noted that Canadian farmers already face a very difficult situation. They have suffered very severe declines in income and they are suffering as a result of the competition they have to face from the treasuries of other countries. They have been left to face this competition with very little help from the federal government. This, I believe, is a factor which should be taken into account.

Some of the concerns of western Canada have also been pointed out by the *Western Producer* in an editorial dated September 23. The editorial reads:

Practically every farm leader in Canada has publicly protested the Canadian government's apparent lack of concern for farmers, who, just as in the case of other industries, are bound to feel the adverse effects of recently-adopted U.S. economic policies. As we noted in this space last week, the government, on the very first day of the new session, announced its plans for assistance to industry.

The reference to industry was, of course, to western agriculture. Then, later the editorial continues:

It seems to us, and to a good many others, that the government was caught flat-footed without a clue as to what should be done to provide farmers with some measure of assistance that would at least partially soften the blow of falling prices and shrunken markets which are bound to be the result of the U.S. protectionist program. Other than some vague suggestion that existing price support legislation might be used, there was nothing to indicate in government answers to opposition questions that any serious thought had been given to crisis faced by the farmers.

Then, again later on the editorial points out:

But the keynote of federal government agricultural policy to date is that everything has been too little and too late, and on occasion, anything but effective.

Mr. Turner's plea for equal consideration of farmers with other segments of industry in this matter is particularly appropriate at this time. He seeks, not special privileges, but an equitable share of a fund set up by the government, ostensibly to assist all industry affected by the new U.S. policy. The government's response to Mr. Turner's request will be enlightening in many ways.

Mr. Turner made other comments to the effect that businessmen and others across the country are worried about the squeeze and that there are 400,000 individual farmers in this country facing a very severe squeeze as well. What does the government intend to do about the situation? We have heard nothing but noncommittal answers from both the Prime Minister and the Minister of Agriculture.

[Mr. Burton.]

I think it should be emphasized today that we face a very serious farm income situation in Canada and that farmers faced a crisis long before the current situation developed. The fact is that farm income has been dropping severely in recent years. When one compares the different sectors of the Canadian economy, possibly even the minister may be impressed by the problems faced by the agricultural sector of our economy. We could point out the various categories of income in Canada. I have before me a table released by Statistics Canada, an agency which comes under the jurisdiction of the minister. I presume he has received a copy and I hope he has given it some very close study because it notes that interest, dividends, and miscellaneous investment income of persons between 1969 and 1970 increased from \$4,169,000,000 to \$5,400,000,000. That is an increase of some \$440 million, 9 per cent or 10 per cent. For non-farm, unincorporated business the net income rose from \$4,410 million to \$4,551 million, not much of a rise but certainly some increase as well. Wages, salaries and supplementary labour income, which also includes the salaries of all highly paid executives and other people, rose from \$43 billion to \$47 billion, which is a healthy increase. With respect to agriculture, however, the net income received by farm operators from farm production dropped from \$1,644 million in 1969 to \$1,162 million in 1970. That is a drop of almost \$500 million in one year, a drop of one third in one year. It seems to me that this is a crisis of the first magnitude in Canada, and one which should receive top priority from the federal government.

• (4:40 p.m.)

But what do we hear from the government? They are conducting a commodity by commodity review. They will announce their policy as soon as possible. For years their policy has been to do as little as possible and to do nothing whenever it is possible. I think we have also seen within the past year a number of indications that the government is committed to a policy of doing as little as possible for the farmers of this country, as little as it can get away with. I do not intend to debate some other measures which are and have been before this House, but I think they do need to be drawn to the attention of the House within the context of this debate. We have had before the House for debate, as hon. members know, the government's proposed grain stabilization plan. The government is trying, through this piece of legislation, to limit its commitment in terms of dollars to assist agriculture in Canada. It is trying to find some ceiling on the amount of money that it will make available to grain producers in western Canada. Regardless of what the minister says or what the government says, this is the reality and the impact of this piece of legislation.

Then, we can also take a look at what the government did when the Canadian dollar was freed over a year ago. The minister and the House know that members of the NDP supported this measure in principle. But we also recognized that, because of the very diverse type of economy we have in Canada, there would be some adverse effects as well. We recognized and pressed on the government the adoption of the principle that help should be given to any industries which were adversely affected by the freeing of the Canadian dollar a year ago. The minis-