

Supply—Agriculture

the cost to the farmer; whereas on the other hand the farmer is obliged to compete in the open market.

I believe it is true to say that, by and large, at least 95 per cent of the farmers would be quite agreeable to free trade if we had to undertake that sort of program; but I do not believe the Minister of Agriculture or the government of which he is a member is playing fair with the people when the farmer, with regard to the things he has to sell, is asked to compete on the world market, while at the same time he is obliged to buy in a highly protected market. That is not the way by which you can build a healthy Canadian agricultural economy.

When we speak about these matters, if we deal purely with statistics I know they are cold, dead things. But I also know that today tens of thousands of our farmers, their families and their children have not the amenities of life, judged on any basis you want to take, be it that of justice or of good living conditions. In no way can you say that they are in a satisfactory economic bracket. We still have tens of thousands of our farmers in the low income bracket, who have not the facilities which we in this day and age regard as the right of every Canadian citizen. The situation is similar in the United States, that great and rich capitalist country. But here in Canada it is our job to try to have an economy by which we can give higher standards of living to our people.

It seems to me that the Minister of Agriculture and the government of which he is a member have been remiss in not understanding that in order to have a healthy economy we must have parity prices for agriculture. In other words we believe the farmers should have guaranteed prices which will return to them a fair share of the national income, in other words a fair price or a price which will have a fair relationship to their cost of production.

Some members of the House of Commons would seem to think such a provision would bankrupt this nation. On the other hand, I maintain that such a program is going to come into operation some day in Canada, and when it does we shall have in this country a healthy economy for more and more people. There can be no contradiction of the statement that the 6,000 unemployed workers in the agricultural implements industry who came here a year ago to meet certain members of the cabinet were unemployed simply because western farmers were not able to buy the farm machinery they needed.

It is true that in some places there are farmers with grain in their bins, a condition

that has come about because of the policy of restricted sales and quotas. They have not been able to sell their grain and have had to store it on their farms at their own risk and expense. I have advocated for a long time in the house that the government should undertake a program of farm storage. On the other hand, the fact remains that when these farmers do have the opportunity to sell their grain they will not get a fair return for it, having in mind the cost of production; and I maintain they are going to find themselves in a most unfair competitive position and will not be able to finance their operations and keep out of debt.

I have here statistics for farm indebtedness covering the years 1937 to 1952. I point out that from 1946 to 1952 farm indebtedness for all Canada increased from \$367.9 million to \$486 million, and since 1952 it has continued to increase. In other words we are still going into debt in agriculture. Therefore I cannot agree with the hon. member for Lethbridge when he complimented the minister on being a fine minister in respect of the discharge of his departmental responsibilities. I think the minister and the whole government are responsible for the conditions existing today, and I say we are now paying the penalty. A few months ago we had 600,000 unemployed, and the government has seen fit to enter into a program with the provinces in an attempt to find a solution of the unemployment problem. I say these things are a direct result of the poor agricultural policy.

Coming back to the matter of conservation, in my opinion the federal Department of Agriculture should establish an authority which would investigate all the ramifications of agriculture—conservation of water, conservation of soil and, indeed, of forests and wildlife. We would then have an integrated policy for the whole country instead of the hit or miss policy being followed at the present time. The provinces cannot undertake such a policy alone. There must be a national authority working in close co-operation with the provinces.

In another speech the other day I referred to certain conditions in Canada from time to time that are termed national emergencies or disasters, and said that merely to try to cure the cause of one disaster independently is not good enough. I think the time has come when we have to change our perspective so far as the watershed program is concerned, and take a look at what it means interprovincially. In the province of Saskatchewan this year tens of thousands of acres will not be seeded, but I maintain they could