

Position of Agricultural Industry

the high returns we receive by the export of our forest products and so on. Yet I venture to say that minerals gradually become depleted and oil wells gradually peter out and forests are denuded; but if we take care of the top six inches of soil and farm that soil properly, we shall have a permanent resource that will bring to this country, both from our own domestic market and those abroad, returns for generations yet to come.

It seems to me that there is no more important problem facing this country than that of achieving stability of the agricultural industry. These fluctuations over the years have been a bugbear to our farmers. A week ago we were discussing an amendment to the Canadian Wheat Board Act. It was an amendment designed to continue that board until 1957. That is good. The farmers of the prairie provinces for many years fought for a wheat board and for some stability in the marketing of their own grain, and finally they achieved success. Today there is not anyone, I think, who is informed who will dare to suggest that the prairie farmers want to go back to the old hit-and-miss system of the open market and the grain exchange. They want to continue the stability thus obtained, but of course they want a fair return for their labour.

When we talk of stable prices we want something like uniform prices both in the domestic market and in the overseas markets. One of the most unfair features of our wheat marketing problem over the last number of years is the fact that our farmers have got less on the domestic market for wheat to be consumed in Canada than they might have got had that wheat been sold beyond our borders. But in spite of the criticism that can be levelled against the manner in which the marketing of grain in Canada has been carried on, there is no doubt whatsoever that our farmers expect that every attempt will be made to continue long-term international agreements for the wheat growers, and I believe that similar long-term agreements should be attempted as soon as possible and whenever possible for other basic farm commodities.

You only have to look at the situation regarding pork, bacon, and particularly cheese and dried and condensed milk at the present time to realize how essential those markets are, and what difficulties the loss of overseas markets creates not only for the agricultural producers, but indeed for the whole of our country and the whole of its economy. I want to emphasize again that the agricultural industry is and must remain a basic industry in this country. That has been the story of Canadian development over the years. With the high costs today there is a danger that

[Mr. Coldwell.]

many young men and women who would like to take up farming, not only as a means of life but as a way of life provided that they could see sufficient returns, are unable to do so. One of the evidences of this instability in agriculture is the number of deserted farms we see here and there, and in the prairie provinces the loss of our rural population, particularly in Manitoba, Saskatchewan and to an extent even in the province of Alberta where tremendous development is going on at the present time. That also accounts for the consolidation of the farms into large units which are being established. Because of the high price of farm machinery, farmers must have enough land to provide a profitable unit to maintain the machinery that is necessary today to replace the labour of other days. Therefore I join with other hon. members in this house in support of the amendment. It is an amendment along the lines of many that we in this party have moved in the house over the years. We believe of course in planned trade. We believe even that when we cannot get dollars for the farm commodities that we could ship abroad and other people could use, we might take the sterling that they have and re-invest it in the backward areas of the sterling region and wait until we can get dollars or goods, in the meantime using our own financial machinery to pay decent and proper prices to the producers of this country. That is being done in some other parts of the world, and I believe that it could be done here provided that we had the will to do it.

I thus want to say both on my own behalf and on behalf of those associated with me that we give very warm support to the amendment moved by the hon. member for Lake Centre (Mr. Diefenbaker).

Mr. J. H. Blackmore (Leithbridge): Mr. Speaker, we have had much talk of objectives in respect of stable agricultural prices, but very little talk as regards techniques. There must be some way of doing things, but nothing has been said about how these things can be done.

Broadly speaking, we have to decide whether we shall expand production in accordance with our resources and then devise an effective method of getting our surpluses into the hands of the needy of the world, or whether we shall restrict production in conformity with our own people's financial consuming power, giving only incidental consideration to the wants of less fortunate peoples of the world. In either case, we must aim at stable prices and markets.

Various techniques are being experimented with today. As an example, may we contemplate the United States methods in respect of her sugar industry?