

Agricultural Prices Support Act

I believe we shall have to have some forward pricing arrangements. After every war there has been a serious agricultural depression. Going back over the history of the last hundred years or so we have found that every time. After the Napoleonic wars there was a serious drop. Then, on this continent, after the American civil war, there was a serious drop. In Great Britain the same thing happened after the Franco-Prussian war.

I remember my father telling me how he took to market in the city of Hereford a load of hops in 1870 or 1871, after the Franco-Prussian war, and got £200 for the load. A few years later the hop-growers, of whom his father was one, were practically ruined by the sudden drop in prices.

We have seen the same thing happen in our own country. After the South African war and the first great war, and indeed until the last war, we have seen serious drops in prices, to the ruin of the farming population. While following the last war we have had the unusual situation of the United States undertaking to finance very largely the feeding and the agricultural rehabilitation of vast areas in Europe, and indeed some other parts of the world, this procedure has enabled us in this country to get by.

At the present time I think we are living pretty much on the generosity of another great nation—and when I say “we” I am thinking of Canada as well as the consuming countries in Europe. As I have said, I believe that a policy of forward pricing is the method under which farmers will be guaranteed prices in the future.

I have watched with a good deal of interest the effect of the forward pricing undertaken as a result of the agricultural act of the United Kingdom. That act, of course, followed legislation put on the statute books by the coalition government when the war was still on, and was carried a step further by the Labour government in that country. Year by year we have seen a tremendous improvement in rural and agricultural conditions in Great Britain due, I think, to forward pricing. The farmers over there, as the hon. member for Selkirk said this afternoon, know when they raise a calf, if that calf is going to be turned into three-year-old steer beef, we will say, what the minimum price will be for that steer, even before they begin to feed it. Or, as he put it this afternoon, they know what it will be four years in advance, even before the cow is bred. As I well know, that has been a tremendous boon to the British agriculturists.

The same applies to milk and to eggs; for eighteen months in advance the farmer knows

[Mr. Coldwell.]

what he will get for his potatoes; he knows what he will get for his sugar beets and for the other commodities he grows.

Having been born and raised, until I reached the age of discretion and came to Canada, in a farming area of the old country, I was interested some fifteen or sixteen months ago to spend a week among the people I had known nearly forty years before. I found there was a transformation in the rural life of the countryside, and certainly a transformation in the conditions of the farmers, who were never so prosperous, never so well off and never as secure as they are at the present time.

Mr. Howe: Why did they vote Conservative, then?

Mr. Coldwell: That is a good question. As a matter of fact, may I tell the Minister of Trade and Commerce (Mr. Howe) that I was predicting before the election was held that they would continue to vote Conservative, and the reason for their doing so was that they are traditionally Conservative. They have never voted anything else, and it will take a new generation to get them to vote anything else. When I was a boy, even a Liberal candidate—a Liberal, mind you—could not get a hall in some parts of the county of Devonshire in which I was born, from the platform of which he could speak. The squire and the local authorities saw to it that he did not have a hall. Often he had to speak from a wagon in a farmyard.

However, they have advanced beyond that and I have no doubt, as time goes on, they will advance still further to the day when they will join with the rest of the people in England in supporting many more progressive measures than they seemed inclined to support in the recent election. But I say it is tradition, rather than anything else.

Mr. Smith (Calgary West): The Liberals were on the wagon, so to speak.

Mr. Coldwell: Well, I am not saying anything on that score. But the prosperity of those agricultural regions is due to the planning of their agricultural production and the guarantee they have that they will get certain prices after they have reaped their crops. This permits them to make plans. If they wish to buy a piece of land—and they can do it today, whereas they could not years ago—they know they will have certain returns to meet that obligation. If they wish to buy machinery, or any other types of farm supplies they are now using, they know they will be able to pay for it as the days go by.

Let me add this, that one of the reasons I think there was no change in the usual voting strength of the parties in the rural