

*Agricultural Stabilization Act*

When the bill becomes law farmers will be guaranteed returns on the mandatory commodities equivalent to at least 90 per cent of the average price of the previous five years, and the price will be adjusted by an index to reflect changes in production costs over that period. I agree with the total over-view and with the expectations of this bill, but I feel at the same time, that there is a reluctance on the part of the federal government to develop and adopt positive and long-term goals for agriculture in this country. As a result, ad hoc policies are adopted from time to time to deal with crises when they occur. The effect of this approach is that many policies deal with the symptoms rather than with causes of the problem. We must address ourselves to the solving of the many problems created in a complicated age.

Our capacities for food production are functioning at less than maximum while malnutrition and poverty continue to prevail in large sectors of the Canadian population, and in much of the world. I believe the maintenance of a strong rural community in Canada is an essential part of our national culture, and that farmers must continue to hold a distinct place in it as basic producers of food.

It is in the best interests of our nation to maintain a sound rural community, which must be based on the strength of an efficient and economically viable farm industry in which ownership is vested in and controlled by farm families.

The government holds a heavy responsibility toward determining the structure of food production in this nation by the philosophical approach reflected through legislation and public policy. The vital issue today facing agriculture is government intervention, or, more specifically, the degree of government intervention. The debate becomes critical because, so far, no government has been able to establish a total agricultural policy for this nation. If food producers do not set the criteria for such policy, sooner or later the government will, and that is why I was pleased by the minister's remarks. He said he would be happy to hear interested groups and would welcome their appearance before the committee when this bill is studied there.

But let me refer hon. members and the minister to what happened in committee when we considered Bill C-19. All witnesses appearing before the committee wanted an indexing clause to be included in Bill C-19. The Progressive Conservative party, even before witnesses appeared, had such an indexing clause ready to propose as an amendment to the bill. The Grit administration rejected the indexing clause which had been proposed by the Progressive Conservative party, even though it was wanted by the farm groups appearing before the Standing Committee on Agriculture.

Is this what the government calls consultation? It came forward itself with a flimsy excuse of an amendment. I cannot understand why it preaches one thing and practices another. If government members wish to have representations made, let them abide by some of the suggestions made at hearings. This has not been the case to date.

The farmer of today is established, organized, knowledgeable and wants to produce. Not only does he want to produce; he can produce. But, Madam Speaker, farmers see

[Mr. Elzinga.]

that the buyers of their produce are few in number. Power is concentrated in a few hands; farmers realize that this is not the best system under which to operate. The new generation of farmers today is not in farming necessarily for the way of life it gives, even though this may be a great factor. They are in it to make a living. I believe they want more stability in their operations, stability with a profit, not excess profit. They want to be assured of some consistency in income, just as we all do.

I could not help noticing that the Canadian Federation of Agriculture said, in a press release, that grain exports are the life blood of prairie agriculture and, for that matter, of a great part of the Canadian economy, and nothing is more important to the economy than developing grain markets and servicing them.

What good is a bill stabilizing income when an individual cannot sell his products? We must come to grips with the strike situation in our country. The strike situation is causing us to lose face internationally, particularly in the area of grain exports. I am thinking particularly of efforts to export grain to Japan, China and Bangladesh. All these export efforts have been disrupted because of strikes. The situation remains stagnant because the government maintains there is no simple answer. I agree there is no simple answer; but we cannot stop there. We must try to develop one. Answers for getting around the strike situation facing us today are available if we are willing to look for them. Among industrialized nations Canada suffered the second highest rate of loss in man hours because of strikes. We have the second highest rating in man hours lost through strikes. This is not an accomplishment to be proud of in Canada.

Again I ask, what good is stabilizing income when we cannot move our commodities? We must come to grips with all the problems we are facing in the agricultural sector today. New procedures must be developed to deal with strikes; we should ask ourselves what form these developments ought to take, and I think we will be able to come up with positive answers.

The Library of Parliament has an excellent book on collective bargaining and the right to strike. It lists a number of options, and we must choose the best alternative to the present system, for the only result of a strike is economic loss, both to the company and to workers. Perhaps it is the public loses more than both of them, because it suffers not only in terms of dollars and cents but in the terrible inconveniences which are inflicted on it in times of strike.

The booklet put out by the research branch of the Library of Parliament lists nine options in connection with strikes. Since the present debate is not on the strike issue but on the issue of stabilizing farmers' incomes, I will not dwell on strikes. I just throw this out as food for thought because I believe the role of collective bargaining, Madam Speaker, is likely to become more, not less, complex in the future. It is not possible to return to a system in which unions and management are left to settle their differences without reference to wider economic and political repercussions. Collective bargaining will inevitably have to take place within an overall framework of law, with an economic and political policy that will impose restraints.