

*Farm Prices*

believe the Regina board of trade was the first organization in Saskatchewan to place before the government—in December last, I believe it was—a resolution, reasonable in terms and reasoned in attitude, calling upon the government to set up some type of machinery whereby farmers would be assured after the war, and for a reasonable period of time, prices in keeping with costs of production.

All hon. members know that six months after the cessation of hostilities measures which to-day are being utilized to maintain prices, but which are effective only through the operation of the War Measures Act, will be at an end. One hon. member stated that something should be done toward having a definite fixation of prices by the board at this time. While this matter has been referred to on other occasions, the minister has not yet assured the committee that the board would have the power in question. I can understand that it would have power to go into the market and make purchases, as apparently under this bill it is empowered; but I do not believe that it could set prices, for that legislation based upon any scheme such as that would be legally effectual.

This bill seems to follow a definite scheme on the part of the government, that of introducing skeleton bills, bills containing titles and preambles and wide delegations of power, but from which no hon. member can possibly tell in advance the course to be adopted by any board set up, the controls to be put into effect, or the scheme of operation or the philosophy which would control a board operating under such measure.

Against this procedure I protest. The hon. member for Yorkton (Mr. Castleden) referred to this point in some detail a few moments ago. It is a serious situation when a bill is brought before parliament which does not set forth the basis upon which moneys belonging to Canada are to be expended, or the basis upon which the board for which it provides will operate. In effect it is a blank cheque to the board, the operations under the measure depending upon the circumstances prevailing or the exigencies at the time of its application. In other words some will say that the bill will ensure parity prices, when in fact, there is nothing in the bill to indicate that parity prices will be the aim of the board in the price levels which it will set. This measure sets a floor price by an indirect method, that of permitting the board to go into the market and make purchases, but the level of prices at which the board will make those purchases is not indicated. The farmer understands floor prices to be prices set at a level which

[Mr. Diefenbaker.]

will assure him of a reasonable profit over and above his cost of production, although some consider them to be the same as parity prices. Under this measure the board is empowered to make purchases, and to set the level of prices at which it makes purchases, regardless of whether that level may be below the level of the cost of production or not. To be fair to the farmers of Canada, and not hold out to them hopes that may not culminate in action, the minister should set forth in this bill the principle that prices paid in respect of farm commodities shall be based upon costs of production and a reasonable profit. That would not require his setting price levels to-day to be effective in the post-war period. But if this bill is to be anything more than the promise of a hope, there must be something in it to show that the prices farmers are to receive will assure them of reasonable costs plus a fair return.

I realize, of course, that if definite prices were set for a period of years after the war there might be constitutional difficulties in the way. Great Britain is setting prices to-day for agricultural products after the war at a level that will assure a fair and reasonable return. Under this legislation the farmers of Canada may hope that the price they are going to receive will be a fair one. And a year hence or two years hence may realize for the first time that under this legislation there is no mandatory requirement on the board to assure our farm population a fair return for products they produce.

We have had ceilings in war time and the provision of post-war floor prices is to be a corollary of that. If the farmer has been willing to accept price ceilings in time of war he must be assured after the war that there will be price levels which will secure for him a fair and proper return.

I should like to ask the minister some questions. Is it his conception that in the operations of this board, in order to effectuate the various sections of the bill, quota systems will be set up? Will prices be fixed from year to year on a contract price basis, or what in general has the minister in mind as to the means whereby the fixation of prices will take place? Finally, what is the basis upon which these prices are to be fixed? Are they to be fixed upon the basis of farm prices in other countries, or are they to be fixed by negotiation between farm representatives of this country, the Canadian council of agriculture, other farm organizations and the board itself?

I have looked over this bill, and in my opinion it represents a continuance of the trend that has been evident during the past