

Farm Products Marketing Agencies Bill

introduction of vertical integration; we saw the integrators move into the picture. This began to play a significant role in many areas of agricultural production. The processors came on the scene and began to take part in the picture. They began to make arrangements with others to get into production and to make market arrangements. Along with them we had the agribusiness getting into the processing business in a large way. During these years fundamental changes have taken place in the agricultural industry, and the passage of this bill will not stop that process.

• (2:30 a.m.)

Now we find that the Liberal party has made an eleventh-hour conversion, or possibly a five-minutes-to-twelve p.m. conversion. I noted with interest the remarks of the hon. member for Bruce and I commend him for his sincerity and frankness in owing up to some of the past sins of omission and commission of the Liberal party in not having taken action in this field before now. I commend him for his frankness and for placing his cards on the table in that regard. But then he said to the House, "Look at what the Liberal party is doing now. Even the Prime Minister is here tonight".

It is very nice to see the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) here tonight. It is quite a change when the Prime Minister comes to the House in the dying hours of the debate to see what is going on. He might learn something. Possibly he might avoid some of the mistakes and comments he has made with respect to agriculture. Maybe he will not make any more such statements as, "Why should we sell wheat for the farmers?" I hope he learns something about agricultural affairs by being present in the House tonight. I do not think the Prime Minister has been conspicuous by his attendance at any time during this debate.

I am proud of the record of the Leader of the NDP (Mr. Lewis) on agricultural affairs. He has spoken on this subject on many occasions in the House, and I am prepared to place his record alongside that of the Prime Minister at any time.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Perrault: How are things in the Mediterranean?

Mr. Burton: He has said more to help solve agricultural problems than any member across the floor tonight. I also note that the Progressive Conservative party has found itself in serious difficulty over this bill. They seem to be hung-up on a number of features of the bill. I suppose one might say that their big beef is that they want to take cattle out of the bill. Some of their members wanted to see the bill scrapped altogether and others were reluctantly going along with it.

In dealing with the bill and the amendment before us I think we have to take into account the situation that we are facing in the agricultural industry and in the rural communities of Canada where real fears exist with respect to this legislation. Why are there such fears? I suggest it is because there is a fear on the part of independent farmers, who have been able to survive, that this legislation will help the integrators and the agribusiness more than it will help the small, independent farmer. It will leave the independent farmer out in the cold.

[Mr. Burton.]

I am not passing judgment as to whether those fears are entirely well-founded. I think there is justification for the fears and I think only experience will prove the validity of some of the claims been made in this regard. I think we must recognize that there is this problem with respect to the reaction of the farm community in this respect.

I suggest that some of the concerns that exist apply particularly to the concept of supply management which has been discussed already this evening. As I indicated during an earlier stage of the debate on this bill, most of us in the House will agree that so far as the principle of supply management is concerned, it is certainly acceptable. It is possible that the acceptance of that principle can be of benefit to farmers and to the agricultural industry. It is consistent with the principle of orderly marketing and with the idea of establishing marketing boards.

But we have to do more than that. We have to do more than simply go along with principles. We have to devise a plan and an approach that will work. That is where the difficulty arises. We have to devise a plan that will help farmers. We have to make sure that to the extent that supply management is used it will be based on wider objectives than those of simply restricting production or relating it to immediate market demand. This idea must be developed within the framework of a total look at rural society, if it is to serve a useful purpose. We must look at the whole picture, at the well-being of farmers and their total situation.

One of the reasons for the fears of the rural community with respect to supply management, however commendable the principle might be, has been the experience of farmers in some parts of Canada with limited application of the concept of supply management over the past couple of years. I make particular reference to two programs as they affected my own province of Saskatchewan. First of all, I refer to Operation Lift, the infamous program where large amounts of public money were spent in a way which, I suggest, had only a minimal effect on the stated objective of reducing wheat production. I suggest that the effect of the stated objectives when the plan was announced was minimal. In effect, the use of the funds was such that they did not go to farmers who most needed them. I suggest, as well, that it was directly in conflict with the principles of the Canadian Wheat Board Act. This plan made use of the quota system to force farmers to go along with the plan which has been devised by the federal government. Farmers are very leery of what else may be in store for them as a result of their experience with Operation Lift.

I might also refer to the operations of the Dairy Commission. Here I will restrict my comments to the effect on the province of Saskatchewan where the major area of concern has to do with the effect of the program on cream production. In contrast with some other parts of Canada, a significant portion of the dairy production in Saskatchewan has always been concentrated on the production of cream for shipment to creameries and other such plants. In 1967, prior to the introduction of the Dairy Commission plan, there were some 23,000 cream shippers and producers in the province of Saskatchewan. At that time all of them were theoretically eligible for a quota subsidy.

Through the plan that was developed by the Canadian Dairy Commission, many of these farmers found that