

Farm Products Marketing Agencies Bill

Had he made a longer speech, I suppose he would have demonstrated his lack of knowledge of agricultural matters to an even greater extent. Regarding the question he asked, I think the purpose of the bill is to have the government assume complete control of the agricultural industry in this country.

An hon. Member: Hear, hear!

• (9:10 p.m.)

Mr. Harkness: I can see nothing else for it but that.

Mr. Gibson: Will the hon. member permit another question?

Mr. Harkness: Mr. Speaker, not now, if my hon. friend does not mind.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Dinsdale: This bill is nothing but state control.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. Would the hon. member kindly resume his seat? The hon. member for Calgary Centre (Mr. Harkness) has the floor.

Mr. Harkness: The hon. member may think he will interrupt my train of thought by these questions, but that is not the case. I will be delighted to answer his questions as soon as I have finished my remarks. He can get up at that time.

Mr. Gibson: Thank you, sir.

Mr. Harkness: In addition to the rigidities which the implementation of this measure will impose on agriculture, and therefore on our economy as a whole to a considerable extent, this bill will put those people who produce a particular commodity that comes under the act in a monopoly position and make it extremely difficult for anybody else to get into that type of production. We have laws against monopolies, but apparently they will not operate so far as this bill is concerned.

I consider one of the worst features of this bill the fact that it will make it extremely difficult for any young man to get started in any type of agricultural production. In order to do so, he will have to obtain a permit and pay for it. And if the production of any commodity, be it hogs, eggs, cattle or anything else, is profitable it will cost a great deal for someone to buy a permit, quota or whatever is necessary in order to get into production. These rigidities, again, will be reflected in the entire industry.

[Mr. Harkness.]

Another inevitable effect of the bill will be that it will squeeze out the small farmer. We have already seen what has happened in this country so far as the Dairy Commission is concerned. According to figures I have seen, between 25,000 and 50,000 small dairy producers have been squeezed out of business as the result of the operations of the Dairy Commission. An effect of this bill will be that inevitably the type of board contemplated will exercise complete control over commodities to be produced, whether the commodity be carrots, honey or anything else, and again the small man will be squeezed out.

You will find that the production of various commodities will be concentrated in the hands of a relatively small number of people, and our whole agricultural industry as well as our rural areas will suffer very materially as a result. One of the effects of this situation will be to expedite the flight of people from the country to the cities, which in my view has been a very bad development in recent years. You will be left with an extraordinarily small rural population. So, just from the general social point of view, I look upon this as a bad and dangerous bill.

Now I should like to pose a question which really comes back to what my hon. friend was asking me. What is the purpose of the bill? Is its purpose to secure a greater return for the producers? I think nearly all farmers who support the bill are supporting it because they think they will get greater returns by doing so. Is this the purpose of the bill? If so, how is this purpose to be accomplished? Surely the chain of marketing which we have at present is going to remain the same. Commodities will move from the farm to the processor—who may be a meat packer, an egg cracker or somebody like that—from the processor to the wholesaler, and from the wholesaler to the retailer who will distribute it just as at present to the general consuming public.

That marketing chain will continue; I think there is no question about that. Of course, there will not be any reduction in the cost of marketing at the levels of processing, wholesaling and retailing. That cost will not be any less and I think it will be a great deal more, because farmers and others will be filling out returns for the government and will have to waste lots of time taking inspectors around and showing them they are not bootlegging eggs, butter or something else. Therefore, the total cost involved in this general marketing chain will be greater.