

*Agricultural Prices Support Act*

agricultural production, even if that production is not economic, or has not been up to the present.

There is a question here, and an interesting one, as to the extent to which increased agricultural production in European countries has been caused by our refusal to trade with them: our refusal first of all to accept the currency which they use; and, second, our imposition of embargoes and tariffs against their goods. Therefore, since we will not trade with them upon their own terms, they have to turn elsewhere. They have to get their agricultural needs where they can get them.

I found that the farmers in Britain, and in my native Ireland, were very prosperous. They were increasing their production. They were not complaining; and when you find farmers not complaining may I say that they are usually doing well financially. Just as an example, to support my own contention and the contention of the hon. member for Rosetown-Biggar, let me tell you that I had a letter from a farmer in the north of Ireland not very long ago concerning a farm in which I have some interest. He is not working his own land any more; he is renting it out by public auction piece by piece; and when I tell hon. members that a field will be rented for the production of grain, say oats after a potato crop the year before, for £16 an acre, they will know that there must be some profit in growing oats in that country. If you translate that amount of sterling into our currency, even at the present rates, it amounts to a good deal of money. It must be remembered that the person who rents that land has to buy his seed and fertilizer, and provide the necessary labour to put the crop in and take it off. And, as the Minister of Agriculture well knows, owing to weather conditions, farming in that country is often not an easy job.

For these people there are just two alternatives. They must buy their needs, their feed, that is to say their concentrates, in the sterling area, if we will not sell these commodities to them, or else they must produce their own. So far as I was able to observe, they are doing both and getting along quite nicely in the process.

In the first instance they are subsidized and aided—I am speaking not of Britain alone but of Denmark, of Belgium, of France, and to some extent of Italy—by their governments, which are setting up an agricultural picture, which bodes ill for our ability to sell much agricultural produce to Europe in the future. Governments are giving very special consideration to agriculture, and since the land areas which are available or arable are all

in use, and since they cannot increase production in that way, they are doing it by improved methods of production and by increased use of commercial fertilizer. These are encouraged, and may I say, in most countries, are subsidized by the government.

The people of Europe have not forgotten the last war. They have not forgotten the war hunger, the post-war hunger, nor the time when the bombs were raining death on them from the skies; and they are never again going to permit themselves to get into the position of being totally dependent upon the North American continent for their foodstuffs, and for their daily bread. They plan—and it is an organized policy in Europe today—to be as nearly self-sufficient in the matter of food production as it is possible for them to be.

I said that the governments were giving some assistance to the farmers. While the minister was speaking I jotted down one or two of the ways in which that is done. First of all, they are guaranteeing prices over a period of time in order to create a feeling of stability. A man knows pretty well ahead of time what he is going to get for his cattle, or what he is going to get for his grain. Second, they are giving assistance and subsidies to farmers who are prepared to drain new land, for there are still some bog and swamp lands which can be rendered tillable. But above all things, they are expanding agricultural research and education. And from the point of view of labour, I found farm labour in Britain and in Ireland much more prosperous and contented than it has ever been before. It has always been an underprivileged and depressed class. It was so in the days of my youth. The wages paid were scandalous. They had no decent standard of living, and they were expected to work from daylight till dark. That is another way in which governments have encouraged production. They have done it by assistance to housing of people who work on the farms, and in the establishment of minimum wages and minimum hours of work.

Up to this point I have been speaking largely of the production of grain and foodstuffs; but what I have said is equally applicable, if not more so, to the production of dairy products, of beef and of the livestock industry. The governments are helping in the matter of legislation, and this is where I am coming to the support act which we have before us tonight.

One interesting thing I discovered was that in certain countries, notably in Sweden, a man may not own or buy land unless he is a farmer. Second, he is not allowed to buy more than he can efficiently use.