

*Position of Agricultural Industry*

**Mr. Coldwell:** I will take that phraseology from the minister, that they are better off than they had been before. But from what the minister said I think the inference was that they were in a pretty fair shape just now. However, I will take what the minister says, namely that they are better off than they have been. As a matter of fact, is that not an admission that over the years we have regarded agriculture in this country as a depressed industry, when we talk about the returns of the farmers today and when all we can say is that they are better off than they have been in bygone years?

That brings us to the purpose of an amendment of this description. As I understand it, the purpose of the amendment is to urge the government and this House of Commons—because I am not placing the responsibility wholly on the government—to endeavour to promote in this country policies that will give more stability of income to our farmers. Over a number of years I have watched the policies that have been put into effect in some other countries and I have come to the conclusion—and it is a conclusion that I came to some time ago—that we shall never have a prosperous agriculture in this country until we had something more than floor prices, some system of guaranteeing to the farmers that over a period of time they will receive certain minimum prices for the products they were producing or, in other words, some form of forward pricing for farm commodities. As a matter of fact, we have had a floor price on butter now for two years. That is good. That is a step on the way to a wider policy, I should hope, as time goes by.

Over the last year we have seen the fluctuations in the prices of beef cattle. Of course in the marketing of cattle there is not the same type of orderly marketing as there is in the marketing of grain. I readily admit that the difficulties are greater. Grain can be stored but when a beef animal is ready to go to the market, that is approximately when that animal must go to the market. I readily admit that there are perhaps greater difficulties in connection with cattle marketing, but I believe that a policy could be produced—at least a board of livestock commissioners could be set up—which would give to our livestock producers a better guarantee of stability of returns for a stated period of time than they have had over the past number of years.

If we are going to give this stability to farm prices, and if we are going to find a relationship—as ultimately we shall have to—between what it costs to produce farm commodities and what the farmer gets for

them, then of course we have got to think also in terms of marketing those products. This afternoon I am not going into the marketing problem except to say this. An examination over a period of years indicates that the policy we have been pursuing over the past few years—that of relying to a greater extent than in the past on the American markets—is one that is going to cause our farmers and this country a great deal of difficulty in the near future.

Before I came down to the house this afternoon I looked over some extremely interesting figures, showing the percentages of trade during the period from 1920 to 1952, and I found this fact to be exceedingly interesting. Immediately after the first world war in 1920 we find the United States taking from us a fairly high percentage of our farm products. We find exactly the same thing after this second world war. But when we get between the two wars, and particularly in the depression period, we find that the relative positions of the United Kingdom and of the United States were most marked in this way: the United Kingdom took a fairly high percentage of our farm and other products and the percentage of our farm products taken by the United States dropped drastically during those years.

If we examine the whole story of the attempt to market Canadian products abroad, we find that the only stable market we have ever had is the one we had for a large number of years in the United Kingdom and in western Europe. Consequently the resolution moved the other day by my hon. friend is a resolution calling for more stability in farm prices; and if we are going to achieve that stability in farm prices, we have to have some stability in the markets in which we shall dispose of our farm products. It seems to me that this house has got to reconsider this whole problem of international marketing, and that we have got to consider ways and means of enabling our customers in those markets that we have had throughout the years to earn a sufficient number of dollars in our country to buy those basic supplies upon which they must depend both now and in the years to come.

This afternoon I am not going into tariffs and all that kind of thing, but it seems to me that one of the problems we have to consider is how we are going so to lower our tariffs that those countries that will buy our farm commodities will be able to get sufficient dollars in our country in order to buy those commodities. After all, I know that in the last few years a great deal of stress has been placed on the development of our minerals, on