

Supply—Agriculture

livestock marketing act, or in the event that they could not see their way clear to do that to implement the provisions of the floor price legislation which was passed in 1944. The same thing can be said of other agricultural products, but I am not going to deal with those at the moment.

The minister will say, as he has said in this house, that we have a floor price under hogs. A great many other people are saying that. There is not a farmer in my part of the country, and I doubt if there is a farmer in the whole of western Canada, who does not believe that this government has established a floor price under pork. It is for that reason that I have brought this discussion before parliament today. I should like the minister to make some definite clarification, something he has not done in the past to my knowledge, to show just what the case is in respect to floor prices.

To justify my statement that people by and large believe that there is a floor price I should like to indicate what was stated at the dominion-provincial agricultural conference held in Ottawa on December 5, 6 and 7 last. Representatives of the ten provinces were present and it was stated that those ten agricultural representatives had argued that it was necessary to continue support prices for butter, eggs and hogs and the freight assistance on feed grain. Even those ten representatives of the provinces believed that there is a floor price under hogs. I question that very much and I hope the minister will clarify his position before this debate is over. If there is a floor price, why was it, in the face of the evidence which I produced a moment ago, that the price of \$26 should have dropped to \$23 when there was absolutely no justification for that drop?

The minister will say, as he said on one or two occasions just lately, that until the provinces enter into marketing agreements and set up marketing boards the hands of this government are tied in respect to floor prices. I wonder to what legislation the minister was referring when he said that the federal government will give assistance to the provinces when and if they set up marketing legislation.

I wonder if he was referring to the Agricultural Products Co-operative Marketing Act. Apparently he was, because of what he said in Saskatoon on April 24 when he was speaking to the members of the farmers' union. They had been giving a great deal of consideration to establishing a marketing board out there and the minister went out to give them some advice and answer a few questions. He outlined what the present

federal legislation provided for if a marketing board was set up under provincial law. The report of this meeting continues:

The co-operative marketing act of 1939 allowed the federal government to enter an agreement with a producer marketing board, whereby the government could guarantee up to 80 per cent of the average price over the preceding three years as an initial payment to the producer.

However, Mr. Gardiner made it clear this was not a support price, and that the federal government would not wish to enter an agreement of this type whereby it would be continually subsidizing the producer.

Then the minister went on to say that the federal government did not have legislative power to set prices for producers. I challenge that statement. If the minister was indicating that if a province went ahead with a livestock marketing scheme the federal government under the Agricultural Products Co-operative Marketing Act, would come into the picture and that that would have some stabilizing influence on the price of hogs, then I have completely misinterpreted the act itself.

The Agricultural Products Co-operative Marketing Act does not set floor prices. They only assume some responsibility; they give some assurance that if the price of a product falls below the average wholesale price for the past three years the government will come to the assistance of that organization to a maximum of 80 per cent. In the past that has been scaled down on a sliding basis and in reality it has been more like 60 per cent and I understand that at times less than 25 per cent. Therefore I suggest that no province is going to benefit from this legislation and to say that it will is a pretty nonsensical statement. I should like the minister to state if this is the act he had in mind when he said the other day that the federal government would assist the provinces if they set up marketing schemes. I hope he will make that clear today.

Then I wonder if the minister is referring to the Agricultural Prices Support Act which was introduced in 1944. There is nothing in the estimates this year to indicate that any money is going to be paid out under that act. I should like to see something in that respect. In the first instance this act was conjured up by the government during the war with the idea of giving some support to agricultural products. The government was given complete power to introduce such legislation during the transition period from war to peace. As has been quoted here on many occasions, Mr. King, the prime minister at that time, said:

If, to help win the war, the farmers are asked to accept a ceiling on prices, we believe they are entitled to a floor under prices to insure them against an agricultural depression after the war.