

*Agreements Respecting Marginal Lands*

ways and means that will be considered. The development of this phase of the program envisages a large measure of local participation. It is proposed that the federal and provincial authorities would provide guidance to local groups in assessing their own circumstances and developing new sources of income. It is, of course, intended that all services and agencies of the departments of government in Canada which can contribute to this will be brought to bear in the total effort. It is also envisaged that the federal government, in co-operation with provincial governments, universities, educational institutions and individuals will carry out programs of research and investigation in the general field of rural development.

Finally, the legislation will authorize the Minister of Agriculture to enter into agreements with the provinces to carry out soil and water conservation projects for agricultural purposes. The importance of this, I think, is understood very well by all members who have farmers in their ridings.

I should like to make it clear that it is not the purpose of this legislation to reduce the number of farmers. Those who feel that the small farm problem can be resolved by arbitrarily uprooting people from their farms do not, in my view, understand the deep attachment of rural people to their home surroundings. This legislation is designed, rather, to help by various means to improve the income and standard of living of the small and more marginal family farms, and in that way help to improve the over-all position of agriculture.

In recent months I have discussed these broad proposals in very general terms with the provincial ministers of agriculture and the farm organizations, and have found them quite sympathetic to the principles which are involved. Pending the introduction of the bill in parliament I was not able to discuss the proposals in detail and I should like to suggest, Mr. Chairman, that following first reading of the bill, it be laid over so I will have an opportunity to go to the provinces and the farm organizations and discuss it with them in more detail, with the idea that since it is going to require co-operative action with the provinces, and should have the full support of farm organizations, they should be able to comment before we proceed to the final stage.

As I said earlier, the problems that this bill is designed to come to grips with have been known for a long time. I personally heard them discussed over 30 years ago. I well remember hearing one leading figure of the province from which I come make the statement that some day some government would have the courage to tackle the

problems of the marginal farmer. I am very pleased that the agriculture ministers of the various provinces—all the provinces—and the leaders of the farm organizations have indicated their support of the principles of this bill. I know that every member from a farm riding will have knowledge of areas within his riding, or groups of people within his riding, which could be helped and benefited by the type of agreement that we envisage in this program. I hope that during the discussion of the bill those members will bring forward their various ideas on how this bill can be used in their particular ridings so that we may get the ideas at the administrative level on what should be done.

I like to think that at long last the full resources of mind and energy of the best agricultural brains in Canada at all levels will be brought to bear on the problems of the small farmer to help the small farmer help himself, not only at the local level but right down to the individual farmer. Under this bill, the full scope and influence of the Agricultural Stabilization Act, the Farm Credit Act and the Crop Insurance Act can be utilized. I feel that these four acts working together in unison can become a comprehensive co-ordinated attack on the basic weaknesses of the agricultural economy.

Most of the preliminary preparation of this legislation, as is well known, has been under the capable guidance of my predecessor who is now the Minister of National Defence. My task will be the working out of the agreements with the provinces and providing the co-ordination among the various departments at Ottawa to help make this program a success. I want to be able to say that no longer is agriculture looking at its problems in a vacuum, but is now turning its eyes to the broader horizons of opportunity that exist for the use of the land, the water and air which are the natural assets of the farmer. I realize that I am not expressing new ideas, but I do feel very humble that the opportunity has fallen to me to put them into legislative form and at long last get at the task of helping the small farmer to his feet. Their problems have been a blemish on the record of our society for decades, and every member of the house, I hope, will share the satisfaction of making a contribution to such a forward step in the field of agricultural development.

**Mr. Argue:** Mr. Chairman, before the minister resumes his seat I wonder whether I might ask him a question which I think has a great deal to do with the application of this measure and the discussion that will take place subsequently. Can the minister

[Mr. Hamilton (Qu'Appelle).]