

Farm Products Marketing Agencies Bill

On behalf of Canadian farmers, I would like that the responsible people in this House and the members demonstrate, in the coming year and in regard to our debates, the realistic approach which the public is so eagerly awaiting. May 1972 bring upon us the objectivity and sincerity that are so much desired so that our laws take into account reality as well as difficulties and that they may continually improve the present situation of agriculture.

I will restrict myself to those few comments, in repeating that I support this bill and I would rather see the government introduce a bill than limit myself to expressing criticism without offering a better alternative.

As far as the arguments which were put forward are concerned, I said that some of them were good. The government has accepted a number of them. I am not convinced that a better solution than the government's has been submitted by other parties. In those circumstances, I prefer to support a bill which attempts to bring about better conditions and allow farmers to regroup and receive through those agencies more adequate incomes and thus providing some hope for the future of farming in this country.

[*English*]

Mr. John Burton (Regina East): Mr. Speaker, I was very interested in the exchange that took place a few minutes ago between the hon. member for Bruce (Mr. Whicher) and the hon. member for Kent-Essex (Mr. Danforth) with regard to the stand of the farm organizations in respect of this bill and some of the changes which they proposed. I took note of the comment of the hon. member for Bruce to the effect that in fact the government had adopted the changes requested by the farm organizations. I would have to go along with him to some degree because I think it must be acknowledged that some of the changes requested by the farm organizations have been adopted. However, I should like to draw to his attention that there is before us at this very moment a motion to refer the bill back to the Standing Committee on Agriculture for the purpose of making a change which was requested by a major farm organization and which was not included in the amended bill.

I refer to the motion moved by my colleague the hon. member for Timiskaming (Mr. Peters) to refer the bill back to the committee so that a change could be made in order to give farm organizations and farmers a voice in setting prices that would give them some bargaining power in dealing with the board and marketing agencies which might be established under the bill. This change, however, was not adopted by the government. I would commend to hon. members that we give favourable consideration to this amendment because I think it constitutes a very important feature of this legislation. I believe its importance should not for a moment be underrated. It is for this reason I wanted to take part in the debate.

I certainly favour the amendment proposed by my colleague. It seems to me common sense that we should make adequate provision for the voice of the farmers, not only in the establishment of a plan for marketing agencies or in giving farmers a voice in terms of one or more members on a board, agency or directorate but also in giving them some say in the day-to-day operations of the

plan—because it is not in the structure of the plan that we run into hang-ups and problems, but in connection with the operations the agency carries on from day to day, week to week and month to month. Farmers must have more say in respect of agencies which have a critical and important effect on their livelihood and well-being.

For this reason I would hope the House, even at this late hour, would agree to make this change because I feel it would be in the best interest of agriculture. I feel it would be in the best interest of the successful operation of this bill when enacted into law. Therefore, I hope the hon. member for Bruce (Mr. Whicher) and other members of the House will give it favourable consideration. When we take a look at this matter, I think we must take into account the history of marketing boards. I think it is known that members of the New Democratic Party and members of the CCF which succeeded the New Democratic Party long argued for the principle of marketing and marketing boards in order to deal with agricultural products and the many problems that arise in connection therewith. This idea emerged during a stage of Canada's history when farming was for the most part conducted on an independent basis and when our farmers could be said to be the only group in our society which operated with a classical free enterprise voice.

That was a classical case and the only such case in our history for a long period of time. In fact, they represented a true definition of what constituted an independent entrepreneur operation on a private basis. In other words, one operator or even a combination of operators could not significantly by themselves influence the structure of the market and the operations of the market. Within the framework of this situation, why were marketing boards proposed? Why was the marketing board idea brought forward? I suggest there were three basic reasons for this. One was in order to give the farmer and the agricultural industry as such some bargaining power in the marketplace, and to give them some marketing power in relation to their relations with the balance of the economy.

Second, it was for the purpose of introducing a greater measure of stability in the agricultural industry in order to iron out some of the severe fluctuations which had a detrimental effect on the industry. Third, it would have the effect of introducing a greater measure of internal equity within the industry so there would be fair and equal treatment for all farmers who were dealing with one product, or group of products, and there would not be a continuation of the situation where one farmer would get a break and another farmer, often for reasons completely beyond his control, had to take a poor market situation because he had no other choice.

Down through all the years when this need was pretty obvious to many people and when farm organizations were asking for the adoption of this idea, what was the Liberal party doing? We found that by and large it was rejecting the idea. Some members put the idea forward, I suppose sincerely, but for the most part the members of the Liberal party rejected the principle of orderly marketing and marketing boards during the years when it could have been of great value to the farmers of the country.

During the time when they could have done something through this particular method of handling affairs, changes were taking place within the industry. We saw the