

● (1720)

[English]

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Winnipeg-Fort Garry): Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a few comments on Bill C-215 and to join with the Hon. Member for Richmond-Wolfe (Mr. Tardif) who will also comment upon it. At the outset I should like to say that we agree with the intention of the proposer of this Bill that it should go forward to committee for study. It is a novel idea, one which certainly deserves examination by a parliamentary committee.

I remind the House that last June a similar Bill with many of the same ingredients was, by accord, sent to committee. For reasons and events upon which we no longer have to dwell, namely a federal election, it was not given proper examination. I regret that more time was not allowed for this Bill to be examined, in that the previous Government might have had time to present its case. In any event, that is history. The position we took when in government is the same one we adopt as the Official Opposition. It is an idea which is worth examining. We welcome the recommendations and representations of a number of agricultural groups in the country. They have presented this idea and have helped the Hon. Member for Yorkton-Melville (Mr. Nystrom) to put the concept together. I think this is a fine time for Parliament to have this opportunity.

Mr. Nystrom: It is exactly the same Bill.

Mr. Axworthy: Yes, I think it is the same Bill. However, I want to emphasize that no one should begin to believe that it is a panacea. Probably the mover of the Bill would be the first to agree that it is only a part of trying to deal with the real sense of panic which is developing in farm communities. It is reaching a point where it is no longer a matter of interest group politics or of people trying to gain some advantage for themselves. There is a deep fear in many farm communities that unless something is done to deal with the income problems they face, agriculture will be undermined. In part, that is what this Bill is designed to address.

What really is needed—and perhaps the initiative in this regard is more on the government side—is a companion piece of legislation to deal with what is happening in the international arena. There is no question in our mind that the breakdown of the international wheat agreement and the very strong threat posed by the United States and its new marketing practices will create even further developments that will force prices down. If that is the case, the cost price squeeze we have seen over the last decade will become even more extreme and the opportunity for farmers dealing in these basic commodities to find some way out of the morass will be absolutely damaged beyond repair.

I urge Hon. Members opposite to talk to their Ministers. Hopefully they will read the comments on this Bill and will see that it is a number one priority. Frankly, I was dismayed when I read the trade paper presented by the Minister for International Trade (Mr. Kelleher) and found virtually no reference to commodities. They are not part of the “trade consultations”

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which seem to be going on in Canada. It did not make reference to the fundamental issue of commodities, nor were they the subject of any debate or dialogue at the Quebec City Summit between the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) and President Reagan. In fact, agricultural problems were not on the agenda. However, we know about the major change which is going on in the United States Department of Agriculture. It seems to me that if we are trying to establish a special relationship, certainly coming to some kind of meeting of minds with the U.S. administration on this issue is of prime importance. Without its support obviously no form of parity pricing or guaranteed pricing in the international arena will be possible.

We know the limitations of a Bill like this. It really only applies to domestic consumption, which represents a very small part of the actual production of farmers. I am not downgrading the importance of the Bill because of that, but when we consider how much of our commodities is in the export market, it is obviously time for a companion initiative to deal with the international agreement. I do not in any way deny the difficulty in that regard. We all know how difficult it would be. Agriculture being one of our primary exporting sectors, we have to recognize that the pricing mechanism across the world, the so-called market system, is faltering. With new-found competition from many countries in Latin America, Southeast Asia and the European Common Market, it will be even more difficult for us to compete and sell. This matter really requires the attention of all Hon. Members of the House.

Obviously many other things could be said on this subject, but I wanted to leave some time so that my colleague could address the issue. He has a particular interest in that there are many pork and beef farmers in his area. On behalf of that vast array of Liberals in western Canada, we would certainly support the initiative of the Hon. Member for Yorkton-Melville. We are quite prepared to second any motion to refer the subject matter to committee.

● (1730)

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Tardif (Richmond-Wolfe): Mr. Speaker, I am quite pleased to take part in this debate and like my colleague, I support Bill C-215 aimed at providing and seeking justice which is so much needed in the agricultural industry.

Let me point out by the way that agriculture is quite important in my constituency. There are 2,000 farms, 51 per cent of which are dairy farms. They have gross revenues of some \$100 million and their average size is 225 acres.

One cannot help but notice a number of vague points in Bill C-215. The drafting of the Bill should be improved and adjusted, but the proposal in itself seems quite good to me because it seeks to provide justice and a fair distribution in what I think is probably the most important industry, agriculture.