

*Australian Treaty—Mr. Speakman*

and is sorry to know, that agriculture to-day as regards its marketing conditions is not in a sound and healthy position. We look at our great production of wheat, the mainstay, the staple of our export trade, the staple of the lives of tens of thousands of Canadian families, and how do we find it? Just as I indicated a few minutes ago when I stated that we are always on the verge of the menace of over-production, we find that we have reached that point in regard to wheat and that through all these new methods of production, through the bounty of nature throughout the world, the market for wheat has crashed and the farmers of this country in common with those of others—but in this I am speaking for the farmers of Canada and particularly of western Canada—are facing a future that is devoid of a great deal of hope so far as their main crop is concerned. We assume, and I think we are safe in assuming, that for years the marketing of wheat will be on a somewhat uncertain and doubtful basis. Why do I say that? We find that four years ago there were, as there are to-day, four chief countries engaged in the export of wheat, namely, the United States, Canada, Australia and the Argentine. In those four years from 1925 to 1929, the increase in wheat acreage in those four countries amounted to something like 20,000,000 acres, an amount equal to the total acreage of western Canada four years ago. We find that the warehouses of the world are full and that wheat is apparently unasked for, uncalled for, unconsumed, certainly not because it has lost its value as a food product, but for two reasons: first, the amount of wheat in the world, and, second, the inability, the incapacity of the men, women and children in other countries who formerly consumed our wheat to purchase it to-day. Conditions of penury in many families in Europe have reached such a point that these people cannot maintain the standard of living to which they were accustomed and which was embodied in the consumption of our wheat. Not only do we find them bending every effort to raise in their own country sufficient wheat to meet their own needs, but they are driven by the force of circumstances to mix that stuff down, to adopt cheaper substitutes, to use an inferior brand of flour. In every way we see the per capita consumption of wheat decreasing, while production has gone on unchecked. So I say that from a wheat point of view the future of the farmer of the west is not a very bright one. We find that he has been struggling against these adverse circumstances. We find that his income has been reduced, while his cost of living has remained where it was, and now he turns his eyes in every direction seeking relief.

[Mr. Speakman.]

Naturally, as has always been the case—it is not a matter of legislation, not a matter of oratory, but simply a matter of common sense and common knowledge—just as soon as the wheat market becomes uncertain, the farmers turn their attention more and more to mixed farming. We speak of the fluctuations in the price of butter as though that were something to be deprecated, but from my point of view the price of butter and the volume of production of that or any other dairy product is a direct barometer of the condition of the wheat market. When there is a profit to be made in wheat, when crops and prices are good, what farmer will enslave himself to the job of milking cows seven days a week and fifty-two weeks in the year? They will not do it, and the consequence is that the dairy business remains stationary or goes down, while the energies of the farmer are directed to a more profitable and easier means of making a living. But when the wheat market falls off, they go back to the old sure but slogging methods of mixed farming. That is why I say that there has been a lot of nonsense talked on all sides in this house about the fluctuations in butter prices and butter production. Butter production is a barometer to test the prosperity of the western farmer, and we find to-day that the barometer needle is swinging the other way and that the farmer is turning his thoughts to mixed farming.

Then what do we find? The farmer sees that the market in which he should have a prior claim is laid open to importations from other countries, with no adequate return to himself in the provisions of any treaty. I am not saying that were this treaty abrogated, and the tariff put back upon its former basis, it would bring to the farmer any lasting advantage. That I think will be the answer to the question raised by the hon. member for Nelson (Mr. Bird) when he foresaw danger to the farmer in the very acceptance of his demand by this country. Why do I say that? There is no danger to him morally or economically in keeping the whole Canadian market to himself, thus gaining a better price for his products and a better living for himself and his family. I am not one of those who subscribe to the idea that protection and free trade are moral principles. I look upon them both as being economic policies to be applied in the fairest and most just manner for the benefit of all the people. They are not moral principles at all, and I say that there is no lack of morality in the farmer seeking through any legitimate means to increase his income and improve his standard of living so that he may give to his family some of the benefits to which he feels they