

Agricultural Prices Support Act

members on the other side have criticized figures that have been used by hon. members on this side of the house. Hon. members have emphasized the fact that different figures have been used. Of course different figures have been used because they were being used in regard to different commodities. The figure of half a billion dollars has been used in regard to the losses on wheat—it may be more or it may be less—but generally speaking they are based on the figures that were tabled in the house by the government. Then the figure of a billion dollars or more has been given in relation to all agricultural produce. I am not going to attempt to say whether that figure is too high or too low, but it was given in regard to all agricultural produce, and not in regard to wheat alone. I look upon these losses which resulted from agriculture subsidizing the Canadian consumer as a fund which should now be held in trust by the government for the purpose of subsidizing or stabilizing agricultural prices in the future. I feel that agriculture now definitely has a large credit with the government as the result of having subsidized the consumer during those war years.

The minister referred to the \$200 million fund under the Agricultural Prices Support Act as a revolving fund. I do not think we should be under any delusion in regard to that matter because no doubt there will be times when considerable costs will be incurred to carry out the obligations under this act. In his speech the minister said that there may be times when goods bought under this act will have to be sold at a loss. Personally I do not think there is any doubt about that. At times these losses may be severe, but I doubt very much whether they will be anything near as great as the losses that were suffered by the farmers as the result of the government's stabilization program during the war. Therefore the farmers will not be asking the people to put up any money that the farmers have not already put up themselves during that war stabilization program.

After all, when we stabilize agricultural prices we are not merely helping the farmers out; we are helping the people of Canada out as well, because we cannot have an efficient agriculture unless we have parity prices. Unless we maintain agriculture on an efficient basis we cannot hope to maintain agricultural production at a high level, and it is in the interests of the people of Canada, and the people of the world at large, that agricultural production should be maintained at a very high level.

I have noticed in the press recently what I would call mischievous articles regarding price support. It is unfortunate that articles

of this kind should appear, because they may help to undermine public opinion, and if you undermine public opinion on this matter it makes it that much more difficult for the government to carry out policies that agriculture has a right to expect. I want to quote one of these press articles which appeared in the *Financial Times* of February 17 under the byline of "Tempus". It reads as follows:

Incidentally, while we are putting ceilings on this and floors under that, I would like to see one politician who has guts enough to get up and ask: what about the poor old consumers?

Then he goes on:

If we took out the subsidy structure from foods, I often wonder where we'd land. Maybe the consumer would get a break; a thought, apparently, often repugnant to the government.

Let me say that no group in this house has given greater consideration to the needs of the consumer than has this group. On the other hand, let us not forget that, as the Minister of Agriculture said, 60 per cent of consumers are either directly engaged in agriculture, or in some way directly connected with it. Therefore a very large percentage of the consumers are interested in agriculture and are affected considerably by agricultural policy. There are no truer words spoken than that the prosperity of Canada depends to a very large degree upon the prosperity of the farmer. Tempus suggests that if we drop price support the consumer will get a break. I recall that back in the thirties there was no price support on agricultural produce. The bottom dropped right out. The price of butter fell down to 8 cents a pound, eggs to 5 cents a dozen, wheat 19½ cents a bushel, oats 5 cents a bushel. You could not have the price of agricultural produce very much lower than it was at that time. I ask this question. Did the consumer get a break at that time as a result of these low prices? I would say definitely that the consumer went broke because in many instances he was not able to buy even at those reduced prices. Especially do we remember that during that period we had a million people on relief, over half a million unemployed, and many people with very low income. Therefore as a result of agricultural prices falling to that low level the whole Canadian economy was badly wrecked. When Tempus suggests that we might give the consumer a break by letting agricultural prices fall, I would say history proves the contrary to be the truth. When agricultural prices have been high the people of Canada as a whole have been prosperous, and have been in a position to pay those high prices.

I think it is well to remember that secondary industries set their prices at a level