

Supply—Agriculture

When I speak about the burden that the Minister of Finance is placing upon the family farm I am not speaking about the very wealthy people of Canada or the very wealthy farmers. The Prime Minister has expressed concern about the problems of the very wealthy, and while he has done that the Minister of Finance has socked it to them. In other words, here again the government seems to have two policies. We have a two-China policy and it seems that the government is developing two policies in virtually every area. I think the Minister of Agriculture is in favour of family farms while the Minister of Finance is doing his best to destroy them. The Minister of Agriculture increases the assistance given to the small farmers, but a few weeks later the Minister of Finance announces measures levying an increased toll on family farms. There is no use mincing words. This is clearly an instance of the government working at cross-purposes. It is impossible to justify, and all that can be said for it is that it will have disastrous effects on agriculture in Canada.

I repeat that I am not speaking of the relatively few large, wealthy farmers in Canada who operate either directly or through corporations. I am speaking about the family farmers about whom the Minister of Agriculture has expressed great concern over the years. I ask him to give some real leadership, not only in this house but also in the government, by standing up for the farmers and telling the Minister of Finance quite frankly what the effect of his measures is. If the Minister of Agriculture is not able to present to this house or to the country constructive measures to help the family farmers in Canada, at least the government can hold its hand and resist the temptation to strike the family farmer over the head the way the Minister of Finance has.

So I say, let us not hear from the Minister of Agriculture nice platitudes and general statements of goals but a willingness and preparedness to fight within the government for agriculture in Canada and to fight the Minister of Finance on the vicious policy that he has adopted. It is all very well to have think tanks, computers, task forces and conferences, but let us have a little common sense and a little consistency.

Mr. Gleave: Mr. Chairman, I appreciated the remarks of the minister as we commenced our discussion of the estimates. I appreciated his statement that quality food at reasonable [Mr. Stanfield.]

prices is a right of all Canadians. It is certainly a right of Canadians to have food and it is probably their right in a society such as ours to have that food at reasonable prices, whatever that may be. Along with that right of the Canadian consumer must go the right of the farmer to have a reasonable return for an hour's work, the right to have a reasonable return on the capital he must invest in his enterprise if it is to be an efficient agricultural enterprise, the right to have a return equal to that of his urban cousin who eats well because the farmer produces well. This is really the crux of the situation with regard to agriculture today, whether or not the farmer is going to receive an adequate return on his labour and capital, and whether his rights are going to be given equal consideration with the rights of the Canadian consumer.

● (4:20 p.m.)

There is no question but that the consumer has been well served. About a month ago I referred in this house to information from the Department of Agriculture which indicated that the consumer could buy more butter, more eggs, more milk, more meat, more of all these products for an hour's work based on wages in the manufacturing industry than he could some years ago. I wonder whether the farmer can buy more of urban production for an hour's work than he could that many years ago?

Today we find that farmers are still working a 12 or 14 hour day, although working days of this length are a thing of the past in industry. I have observed this year after year on prairie farms. After I was here a short time I drove out to see a friend of mine in the Ottawa valley. I arrived there about sundown on a Saturday, and it seemed to me that I might have been back on the prairies. This was a modern farm, but I had to go out into the fields to look for the farmer. There was a field of corn over half a mile long which looked like a wheat field on the prairies. The corn stood taller than I am, but of course I am not a very tall man. The lights were on in the milking barn which was modern and up to date. Where was the farmer? He was out in the field at sundown harvesting the corn and his wife was driving the truck. This is the kind of working day the farmers still have, even though some of them have well organized, well financed farms such as there are in Ontario or in some areas of Saskatchewan. These are the only two areas about which I have any personal knowledge. I have