

Farm Products Marketing Agencies Bill

I have been connected with agriculture all my life. My first memories are of a farm near Brampton, Ontario. My boyhood was spent on a ranch in Saskatchewan. I have owned farms or been connected with farming enterprises since that time. Of the tens of thousands of farmers I have known and spoken to, each wanted to make his own decisions, individually or collectively. He did not want some outside group of people telling him how to run his business. Mr. Speaker, that is exactly what this bill is designed to do.

Mr. Danforth: Hear, hear!

Mr. Harkness: I do not think the farmers of this country realize what is involved if this bill is passed and fully implemented. Of course, I do not believe it is possible to fully implement the bill but the attempt could be dangerous and could cause a great deal of difficulty. The bill leaves full control to the government. For his own purposes the member for Okanagan Boundary (Mr. Howard) spoke about producer-controlled marketing boards in British Columbia. I think he is speaking of the fruit boards, and possibly the Fraser Valley milk producers and things along this line. But, Mr. Speaker, these are producer-controlled boards which control the products of their own members. They have an annual meeting and the members can get rid of the board or the officers if they are not satisfied. A board of that kind is formed when 66⅔ per cent of the producers are agreeable and the producers themselves have complete control.

This bill proposes a completely different thing. It bears no relationship to these producer-controlled boards. Under this legislation, control will be in the hands of government or its appointed council or agencies. The people appointed to those positions will be responsible to the government and can be fired by the government; and they will be fired if they do not do what the government tells them to do. Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, most of them will be Liberal heelers of one kind or another.

An hon. Member: That is the whole idea.

Mr. Harkness: They will be defeated Liberal candidates and people like that. These certainly will not be boards such as the hon. member for Okanagan Boundary mentioned, elected by the producers and responsible to the producers. They will not be responsible to

anybody except the government, and will be completely under the thumb of the government.

Mr. Olson: The people elect the government.

Mr. Harkness: They do, but unfortunately once the government is elected it is in office for four or five years and a lot of damage can be done in that time by an irresponsible government such as this one. If the minister wishes to ask a question or make an intelligible interruption, I shall be delighted to deal with it, Mr. Speaker, but it is very difficult to deal with unintelligible interruptions.

An hon. Member: Or intelligent.

Mr. Harkness: Well, I did not say that, but people can draw their own conclusions. This bill is designed to put the producer in the position where these government appointed councils or agencies can tell him how much of any particular commodity he can produce, how it is to be marketed, and so forth. There is no doubt that this will make for an extremely dangerous rigidity in the whole agricultural industry. We will have the same type of system in effect in agriculture as there was in the feudal ages, when the economy was in a rigid frame and it was impossible to break out of it. If this bill is passed and implemented, we will have in agriculture a rigidity which will make it difficult for farmers to operate and which in the end will drive them out of business.

Mr. Gibson: Would the hon. member permit a question, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Harkness: Certainly, Mr. Speaker. I am always delighted to accept a question.

Mr. Gibson: I ask this question with humility, realizing that I am not an expert on the subject. Is not the real aim and substance of this bill the guaranteeing of various marketing factors in the country, particularly with reference to interprovincial matters, where there is a problem in one province in the west, say, and a different problem in another province? Is the idea not to get the various farm agencies in the different provinces together, and through co-operation to set up a network of agencies so they can come together on policy and serve their common interests?

Mr. Harkness: Mr. Speaker, I understand the hon. member's lack of appreciation of this bill just from the short speech he has made.