

The hon. member for Essex East made a very interesting statement to the committee. No doubt the fact that the Liberal party has such a large array of very competent and highly qualified research assistants has assisted the hon. gentleman.

I do not want in any way to detract from the hon. member for Essex East who shows in this chamber a great capacity to appear well-informed on subjects about which he has very little knowledge. I shall always remember and admire how on one occasion the hon. gentleman spoke eloquently for almost 30 minutes on the whole question of deficiency payments. I thought at the time how much better it would have been if the hon. gentleman had spent one or two minutes briefing himself with respect to the definition of deficiency payments.

I wish to welcome back to the chamber the Minister of Agriculture. He has been here only once or twice since parliament reconvened. He has become a rather transient or travelling minister. On most days during this session I have had prepared questions on agriculture to ask to the minister but he was not in the house because he had very important engagements to fulfil in various parts of this country.

The hon. member for Essex East has referred to the minister as the arch propagandist of the government. This government needs a salesman and the minister is doing his best to sell a very difficult product to the Canadian electorate, namely the record of the government.

I believe the minister is wise in not attempting to push through parliament the bill that will follow this resolution before consulting with the provincial governments. I think a great error was made on a former occasion with respect to the crop insurance bill when the government took a rather high-handed attitude and introduced the legislation, pushed it through and made a provision under which the great bulk of the cost of crop insurance would be borne by the provincial governments and insured farmers and little would be borne by this government.

I hope that in the negotiations that take place in working toward agreements under this proposed measure the government will be generous in its contribution, will give some leadership to the province and will embark upon programs that will assist in agricultural redevelopment and in the improvement of rural life.

The great question facing the farmers of this country is the matter of current income and markets for current products. The measure before the committee this afternoon is a long term one. I do not say that tree planting, tree farming and pulpwood farming

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do not have some part to play in the agricultural economy but in going about the nation talking to farmers the present minister has become known as the Christmas tree Minister of Agriculture.

When you tell the farmer that the answer to his problems under the latest proposal of the government is that he should plant trees and produce pulpwood he will say, "That is fine for my grandchildren, but what am I going to do to sell my current products at a reasonable price?"

The minister said the government had four agricultural policies. This will be the fourth measure placed on the statute books. The minister said these policies would provide solutions to the problems of agriculture. In the judgment of this group the first and foremost policy this government should adopt and which it has failed to provide is one that would establish parity prices for agricultural commodities.

The government's legislation on the statute books in relation to support prices for agricultural commodities has been in the main a cruel hoax. Following the passage of Bill No. 237, as it was then known, farmers across Canada felt that under that legislation the government would provide parity prices for agricultural commodities. The fact of the matter is, as the record shows, that under this government's price support policies, with deficiency payments and the establishment of averages, the farmer in the main has received lower prices for the chief products that have been supported than he received in the years immediately prior to this government taking office. Instead of receiving improved prices for hogs and eggs the farmer has received lower prices under the program adopted by this government. The first thing this government should do is to fulfil its election commitments establishing parity—not charity—prices, instead of the present policy the government follows which has provided neither parity nor charity as far as the average farmer is concerned.

The second essential thing in terms of agricultural policy which is not dealt with in this resolution is the need to provide markets for surplus agricultural commodities. There is a great challenge facing this government. It is not one of shutting down the small farm which this legislation must inevitably mean as well as the consolidation of farms. This legislation, of course, means that. The challenge is not that of pushing the small farm out of existence to provide an acceleration of economic units. The great challenge is to move the vast glut of surplus agriculture products to market. This is the challenge and the minister in this instance should raise his sights.