

Farm Income

This easy period was followed by a decline in prices, while obligations remained the same; the farmers who had committed themselves at that time, were deep in debt, but had no money to pay. It was at that time, between 1930 and 1935, that the Conservative government of Prime Minister Bennett introduced a piece of legislation in this House which was passed by Parliament and was known as the Farmers Creditors Arrangement Act. Under this Act, creditors were required to accept reductions of monies owed them as well as agreements with borrowers so that those farmers could keep their farms, in order, in the years following, to continue their operations, and eventually pay off their debts.

● (1652)

Mr. Speaker, I was forced during these years—and I am not ashamed to say so—to turn with all the other people who were in the same situation, to wards the so-called “back to the land” movement. They got rid of the unemployed in cities by sending them to the so-called settlers’ parishes. They were expatriated and left in misery. Today, we see abandoned churches and houses in many parishes which were built with enormous sacrifice and miseries during these years. As far as I am concerned, I was among the lucky ones. I was a farmer and I am not ashamed of it because Canada was precisely built during these first years, these first parishes, these first towns by people named “settlers”. This word means that they settled, reclaimed land for cultivation, cut down trees, built farms to expand our national heritage.

I thank the Providence, Mr. Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to have this forum today to explain the colonization to those who do not understand anything to farm workers, to those who are the real builders of this country. It is time, Mr. Speaker, that we did some colonization in the minds and the brains of those who control finance in this country, who think only in terms of profits, stockpiling wealth and forget that there are people who deserve to be paid and to live. Mr. Speaker, I think that today’s motion is a good one. Earlier I listened very attentively to the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Whelan). I did not have the opportunity to hear his whole speech because I was held up outside the House in an important committee. I had to be excused to come and take part in this debate.

Mr. Speaker, in all honesty I would like to make my contribution and second the efforts of all those parliamentarians, on either side of the House, who really want to ensure the survival of our agricultural sector.

Mr. Speaker, I recognize that in the last few years giant steps have been made in the dairy industry. But, on the other hand, just today I received representations from milk producers who have not had the opportunity in the last few months to deliver their production and get paid for it. That is unfortunate, Mr. Speaker.

Imagine, for example, if public servants of this Parliament—and there are thousands of them—would be forced at a given moment to work without getting paid every second week. Today is Wednesday, and you should have seen the number of public servants going into banks to cash their pay cheques, which I hope they earned well. On the other hand, you would have seen the number of people in front of the office of the Treasury Board to claim their pay cheques if they had been denied them today. That is the same feeling experienced by farm producers and milk producers. Those people must capitalize heavily.

Mr. Speaker, it can be boring to quote statistics, but I think that it is necessary from time to time. In 1975, the average capital investment for farms was \$135,000. This is a lot of money, and to be able to stay on the farm, especially in dairy production, you must invest even more money. I would like to quote some figures because I believe that it is necessary to see in what direction we are going. In 1850, and some may say that this is old history and that they do not care to hear about it, but we do care about our history. This week, the Prime Minister of Canada quoted whole pages of our history during a visit to Western Canada. I think that he was right and that it is unfortunate that our young people do not know the history and the origins of their country better.

Yesterday, we had in Ottawa students from all provinces of Canada. I was able like many others, for instance, like the hon. member for Riviere-du-Loup-Temisouata (Mr. Gendron) to meet these young people from Riviere-du-Loup and to see that they were very interested in this institution and in our proceedings. They visited the galleries and many of them were quite surprised to see that the French-speaking and English-speaking parliamentarians were able to meet, to exchange views, because they have been taught that we should hate each other and were not allowed to meet. It is therefore essential that our young people learn about our history, Mr. Speaker. This is why I want to quote some true figures to see if there is really nothing to be done to save our agriculture, which can not only provide food for the Canadian people, but also, because of the richness of our soil, produce a certain amount of food to ease the misery and hunger of human beings in other countries.

In 1850, the Canadian farmer provided for the needs of four people. He needed all of his time to do so. In 1960, the farmer could provide for the needs of 28 people. In 1976, which is not very long ago, the farmer could provide for the needs of 55 people. According to current estimates, the population of Canada will increase from 22.5 millions to 27 millions in 1990, if we stop allowing abortions, of course. We can therefore conclude that the farmer will then have to feed even more people. However, it is important to note that in 1930, the Canadian labour force amounted to four million people, of whom \$1.3 million, or 33 per cent, were farmers.

But in 1965, the work force had risen to 9.3 million, of which 0.48 million or 5 per cent only were in farming. There-