

*Farm Products Marketing Agencies Bill*

this House when the bill was introduced in its original form and when opposition members said it should not have a hasty passage because of its complexity and the necessity of giving ample time to various agricultural commodity groups, not only to study the regulations contained in the bill but to study the implications it might have on the entire agricultural industry.

The minister has been very optimistic about the bill and the power which it would give, as well as the answers it would provide to many of the problems facing Canadian agriculture today. The various groups that appeared before the Standing Committee on Agriculture during the summer varied in their approach from almost complete support of the minister and his contentions to the other extreme, almost total opposition to this bill. Although the bill has a great deal to offer the Canadian producer, I have grave reservations whether it will provide all the answers so earnestly sought today.

I am particularly interested in the fact that the minister has indicated both inside and outside the House that the reason the bill should receive speedy passage is to help solve, in the immediate future, the pressing questions of today regarding overproduction of two or three commodities in two or three of our major provinces. He has indicated that this measure will in itself provide a ready answer to what we consider to be a constitutional problem, that is, whether the provinces or the federal government control interprovincial trade.

We are well aware that under the terms of the BNA Act, trade between provinces comes within the federal purview, but as a result of recent action taken in various provinces, the provinces—through the powers that are inserted into the regulations—have seized, to a large extent, control of interprovincial trade and have in some instances erected effective barriers against the free flow of trade between provinces. We on this side of the House are curious why the government has not immediately referred this matter to the Supreme Court of Canada in order that there might be an early determination regarding the power of the provinces to stop or restrict this free flow which we consider to be an erosion of federal powers.

To rely on a bill of this nature to solve such a constitutional problem leaves many questions in the minds of the official opposition. Indeed, together with the assurances of the minister that this bill could be a vehicle by which to settle these perplexing problems, there has been tremendous pressure exerted by two or three of the main commodity groups in Canada, and by some provincial governments, for speedy passage of the legislation in order to arrive at a solution to this problem.

We have grave reservations, on two counts: first, that this bill could provide any kind of solution to this perplexing and legal problem and, second, that the very complexity of the bill will make it almost impossible, once the bill is proclaimed, to set up the necessary machinery to put the bill into effect and to provide ready aid to agriculture.

The bill as presented to Parliament today is, in the minister's own words, an almost exact replica of Bill

C-197. No doubt there are many very pertinent facts which have made it necessary for the bill to be introduced in its present form. But I, and many of the leaders of farm organizations across Canada, wonder why the minister did not take advantage of the recess and of all the information of a highly technical nature that was so ably presented to the Standing Committee on Agriculture by commodity groups with years of experience—information which they presented after months of preparation. We wonder why he did not direct his department to take advantage of this pertinent information which outlined the weaknesses in the bill and the areas where it was thought the bill would cause hardship to producer groups, and so bring in a brand new bill that would solve many of the perplexities that were presented to us when the original bill was introduced.

● (9:30 p.m.)

There may have been good and sufficient reason why the minister did not follow that course of action. Perhaps time was a factor; perhaps there was not sufficient time to redraft a bill of this nature. But if time was a factor, that makes it all the more necessary for us to take time in committee when dealing with the bill. This bill is so serious and important to the agricultural industry of Canada that it must be the very finest bill that the government, backed by its civil servants and with all opposition parties working together, can produce in order to try and solve some of the perplexing problems of present-day agriculture. This is a necessity, and therefore the bill will not have rapid passage through the Standing Committee on Agriculture.

The minister indicated that he would like to have all the evidence presented to the committee last session referred to the new committee. I have no opposition to this, provided one or two safeguards are put into effect. The first safeguard must be that the government does not intend to shut off the presentation of evidence, based on the contention that we already have the evidence before us. If a commodity group or an interested party that has not made a presentation requests an opportunity to do so, they should have their voice heard. The second safeguard is that if an interested group which has already presented evidence thinks it has something further to add, or wishes to change some of its recommendations, it should be allowed to do so. If there is no restriction in these two areas, we on this side would have little difficulty supporting the minister in his request to have the evidence that was presented last session made available to the committee.

I was encouraged to hear the minister speak of some of the amendments that he is prepared to consider. Some of the basic objections that we had are in part met when an attempt is made by the government to allow some—I do not say in total, but some—primary producer representation on the agencies. It may not be possible to have direct primary producer representation on the council itself, due to the fact that the membership must be limited and that all sections of Canada must be represented on it. But this does not hold true for an agency which may be dealing

[Mr. Danforth.]