

Agreements Respecting Marginal Lands

Mr. Martin (Essex East): Just as the hon. member is doing now.

Mr. Hamilton (Qu'Appelle): For the hon. gentleman to suggest it is a fact that we do not want the special committee of the other place to deal with the question of land use in this session is so far from the truth that it is hardly worth mentioning. If the hon. member were to read on in the sixth recommendation he would find that the committee recommended that they reconvene this session to study such questions as water conservation, drainage, forestry, and so on. This is an extension of the valuable work the committee did last session. After having praised the committee as I believe I did by inference, having read their five major recommendations as the result of the work of last year, it is errant nonsense for anyone to suggest that I in particular do not want this committee to reconvene.

Mr. Martin (Essex East): We shall see.

Mr. Hamilton (Qu'Appelle): I think, Mr. Chairman, it can be deduced from the terms of the resolution under discussion that the recommendations of the other house have received due consideration.

This resolution authorizes the government to enter into agreements with the provincial governments or agencies thereof for the undertaking, jointly, of three types of operations: (1) projects for the alternative use of land that are presently classified as marginal or of low productivity; (2) projects for the development of income and employment opportunities for rural agricultural areas, and (3) projects for the development and conservation of the water and soil resources of Canada.

In each of these types of projects there should be careful research by either or both the federal and provincial governments. There must be co-operation not only between the senior governments but also between the senior governments and the local people. One of the key points will be the widest possible participation not only by farmers but by every group in our rural communities. In sum total, agricultural rehabilitation and development must be a co-operative enterprise of government, groups and individuals. I suggest that this should also include the churches.

Many hon. members over the years have asked for an extension of the P.F.R.A. to all parts of Canada. I think it can be said that the third type of operation envisaged in this resolution meets that request.

The sixth point of our national agricultural program deals with conservation. As the committee knows, plans are now being completed for the holding of a "resources for tomorrow" conference in the city of Montreal in October of this year.

It may well be asked at this time what is the relationship between this resolution and our general policies and plans on conservation. Actually there is a very close relationship. There was a meeting of the federal and provincial ministers, who make up the policy subcommittee of the national steering committee of this conference, in Ottawa last December 12 and 13. At that time I explained to the provincial ministers that everything envisaged in this bill would be in harmony with the proposed purposes of the "resources for tomorrow" conference. It is my judgment, Mr. Chairman, that the "resources for tomorrow" conference may expand the terms of reference that we have in mind in this bill, but I seriously doubt whether it in any way will suggest any diminution of its purposes.

Having said these things about the background and purposes of the bill, I should like to go on and outline in general terms how it would operate. Broadly, the intent would be to assess, with the provinces, the agricultural areas which are in need of rehabilitation and to determine the type of assistance which would be most appropriate to achieve this end. Certainly the development of alternative economic uses for marginal agricultural lands will have a large part in the total program. I need mention only two instances of this. One is the encouragement of farm woodlots, of tree farming, of county forests, of reversion into crown lands, and so on, as an example of the thing to be done mostly in eastern Canada. The second example I can give is the conversion of marginal cropping land in western Canada to grass by means of the technique that we know so well out there, namely the community pasture technique. These are only some of the examples of alternative economic uses for land. Others deal with urban expansion, recreation, and so on.

Steps of this nature serve three purposes. They provide for better utilization of marginal agricultural land; they provide new sources of income for people in the area, and to the extent that they remove lands from agricultural cropping they will help to reduce surpluses which constitute a serious problem for agriculture.

In addition to developing alternative land uses, the legislation also envisages the development of new income opportunities for people in rural areas. Local industry, recreation and technical training are among the