

Agricultural Stabilization Act

life in farming, produce food for themselves and for their countrymen, and have a reasonable place in feeding the unfortunate of the world. If we continue to rely completely on new technology as the main tool of increasing agricultural production and do not also rely on programs which will put farmers on the land and keep them there, then we will lose that race, and we will miss that obligation.

This bill before us does not come near to being what it has been touted to be, Mr. Speaker. It is not a new policy of agriculture. It is not a new tomorrow for farmers. It is disaster insurance. It is just the beginnings of finding stability of income for farmers. I think all of us, whether we live on the farm, in the cities, in the towns or the villages, whether we have a direct, indirect or no connection with agriculture, have a duty to recognize the plight of the farmer and to recognize also that there has not been much real progress in terms of widening the gap between earnings farmers receive and their cost of operation, which is driving many of them off the land—and this in a time when we hear pleas from others about high costs and other things.

That is the challenge facing this minister, and as the hon. member for Qu'Appelle-Moose Mountain said, in his own way, we do not regard the farmer as the subject of partisan politics because he is completely fundamental to the operation of our country and the wellbeing of our country. We do not regard the minister in the same way to the same extent. He regards himself as a person given to partisan politics—and to the extent that he has conducted himself that way, he has probably misused his portfolio—but he does have a part to play in the scheme of things. His duty is not merely to point out the problems which face farmers. My God, the farmers know their problems themselves, without his putting the finger on them. The problem is to come up with some policies which are meaningful and new, and that, Mr. Speaker, the minister has not done. That is the duty of the minister, and it is because this bill is a small step in that direction—although it is only augmenting existing legislation—we are prepared to support it, but that does not relieve the minister of the challenge facing him as he faces the problems facing farmers.

Mr. Ross Milne (Peel-Dufferin-Simcoe): Madam Speaker, it is a real privilege to follow such a distinguished agrologist as the hon. member for Grenville-Carleton (Mr. Baker) and his outstanding address on agriculture.

I want to speak on this bill because I support it strongly. I think it is good legislation for the agricultural industry, meaning that it is good for the consumer and for the producer. I think it is one of the first thrusts we have made which has particularly spoken to the problem of the eastern Canadian farmer, and particularly of the livestock and poultry farmer.

I think the most critical thing this parliament can do is work to pass legislation which will allow Canada to become as self-sufficient in food and energy as possible. I do not think there is anything more important with which to be involved. As important as other programs may be, some of them will have to take a secondary position in terms of spending so that we can work toward that objective. I think any country which is essentially self-suffi-

cient in food and energy has to have less inflation, less unemployment, a stronger export position, a stronger industrial economy and certainly a leadership role in the world which no other country can attain.

If hon. members doubt that, I suggest they consider some of the countries around the world which are importing the majority of their food and energy. I think Canada is one of the few countries in the enviable position of not having to do that, if this House supports the legislation now before it.

There are two matters of concern to agriculture, one being the retention of good agricultural land and the other the retention of enough good farmers to use what land we have. It is the second part I think we should be speaking about, and to which this bill addresses itself. It might be well to think of the role farmers have played over the past few years. We should commend the job they have done, because historically we have had reasonably priced food, and our farmers across Canada have done a magnificent job in providing that. They have been able to do so for a number of reasons. One is that their input costs have been reasonably stable.

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Until recently most labour on farms was done by the family, but of course this is not the case today. No one can be proud of the fact, and I am sure none of us are, that much of the stability in food prices has come from the attrition of farmers. At one time 10 per cent of our population were farmers, but because of the boom and bust cycle many were forced to leave the land. Nobody worried too much about that because we had so many to begin with, and food prices remained reasonable.

Farmers should be congratulated on their efficiency as this is what gives us food at reasonable cost. They operate what is perhaps one of the most efficient sectors of the economy. It is interesting to note that in 1949 the price of turkey meat to the consumer was higher than it is today. This is because farmers now produce turkeys in three-quarters of the time and on half the feed, which is a good example of efficiency. The efficiency of farmers in this country is outstanding when compared to farmers in other countries.

Canada has done a good job in agriculture through the programs of the Department of Agriculture and the provincial extension services in such areas as genetics, nutrition, farm management and so on. The problem is, however, that this will not continue because those alternatives will not be open in the future. We have two basic choices. The first is to pay a fair price for food and allow farmers a fair return on their investment and their management skills. We must share their risk. The other choice is to import food and thus put agriculture in the hands of large integrated operations. If this happens then we are certain to have higher food costs.

The basic problem has been well documented, the problem of rising costs. During question period many questions are raised about the labour segment of the public service and other sectors of the economy. In the end these costs all filter down to the farm. If the cost of energy is a particular concern, we must remember that agriculture is one of the major users and any change in the price is reflected in

[Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton).]