

Agricultural Prices Support Act

Mr. Coldwell: Where is the non-discrimination policy?

Mr. Jones: I mention the matter at the present time—and I know the minister is giving favourable consideration to assistance to the farmers—because I should like the government to declare its policy as early as possible. I say that because the farmer is obliged to expend a great deal of money early in the year. At the present time pruning has to take place and has to be paid for. In a short time, before the buds are actually open, we must spend far more money for spraying this year than we did last year. All these costs the farmer, unless he has a subsidy for last year's crop, will not be able to meet.

I should like to draw to the attention of the minister the resolution which was passed on March 17 of this year. I will read it in part:

The executive of the British Columbia Fruit Growers' Association has given instructions that the following resolution regarding financial assistance from the dominion government be placed in your hands:

It is addressed to all members of the dominion cabinet and members of parliament from British Columbia. The resolution continues:

Whereas in 1949 due to a large crop and adverse marketing conditions, the fruit from British Columbia's tree fruit area is being disposed of at a sacrifice price, and

Whereas the recent announcement by B.C. Tree Fruits Limited that it had made a deal with Great Britain to take a considerable quantity of British Columbia apples without charge, and

Whereas this deal will place a very heavy burden on the growers of the British Columbia tree fruits area who cannot afford to carry this load without substantial financial assistance from the dominion government,

Therefore, the British Columbia Fruit Growers' Association, as unanimously represented by its 28 locals comprising 3,805 registered growers, hereby urge that the dominion government subsidize the growers on the total apple crop of British Columbia tree fruits area to an amount equal to the average price of the last three years' prices.

In determining what assistance the farmer should have, the process is simple. We know exactly the average cost of producing a box of apples. As I pointed out before, it may vary from 95 cents to \$1.05. It depends on the operation. But from district to district I understand the variation is not more than 10 cents. I plead on behalf of the farmers who today have less than half the cost of production in sight if no subsidy is given. On their behalf I plead that the government give assistance to the extent of the cost of production, in order to keep a flourishing industry prospering in a prosperous valley and to keep 120,000 people living in one of the finest communities in Canada, which

[Mr. Jones.]

could easily be wrecked by failure of the government to come through to their assistance at this time. The situation may not occur again; we hope it will not. But the conditions were beyond their control and they are appealing to you on that basis.

Mr. Victor Quelch (Acadia): I am glad, Mr. Speaker, to have this opportunity of speaking in support of a resolution to extend the life of the Agricultural Prices Support Act on an indefinite basis. I feel a good deal easier about this resolution than I did about the one which appeared on the order paper last year and which would have limited the life of the Agricultural Prices Support Act to the end of this parliament. However, whilst the passage of this legislation will enable the government to keep faith with the farmers of Canada, on the other hand it does not guarantee that they will do so. In other words, legislation of this kind is of little value to the farmers unless it is actually utilized.

That remark is prompted of course by what took place in Canada in December of last year and January of this year, when the price of certain agricultural products took a drastic drop. For example, it may be remembered that the price of poultry products dropped to depression levels and it took a matter of a month or more before the government took action to correct the situation. I think one of the main reasons why the government took that action was probably the storm of protest that swept Ontario. I certainly must say that I think the remarks made by the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. McCubbin) at that time were unwise because they undoubtedly gave the impression that he was advocating that the government should break faith with the farmers. I am not saying that was his intention, but that certainly was the interpretation which was placed by many farm organizations upon that statement of his.

Let us make no mistake with regard to the responsibility of the government to support farm prices at a level that will bear a fair relationship to the price of other commodities, because, as the Minister of Agriculture has already said, during the latter years of the war the farmers were asked to take less for their produce than they might otherwise have obtained. They were asked to do that in the name of stabilization and therefore this legislation is for the purpose of carrying out a government obligation to bring about or to maintain the stabilization of agricultural prices in the post-war period.

I am not going to say what the losses were that were suffered by the farmers during those years. I notice that a number of hon.