

*Agreements Respecting Marginal Lands*

At the meeting of the Ottawa valley milk producers, according to a report of the *Journal* of November 23, 1960, the minister said:

(Text):

Grow trees instead of cereals on marginal and submarginal land—

Just because you have been taught for generations and generations that the tree is the enemy of the farmer and have been taught to save the soil for cereals, it does not mean that is true.

(Translation):

I would not want to repeat what he said a moment ago about those 20 million acres of land in the province of Ontario, 8 million of which are submarginal.

Again about the problems out west, he added:

(Text):

Every million acres taken out of wheat production and put into other forms of production means 20 million bushels less wheat added to our surplus each year.

He said the market for forest products was practically assured because the demand for them was expected to rise by 140 per cent by 1975.

He reiterated the 20 year old suggestion that Ottawa valley farmers could save 10 cents a bushel on western oats if they bought the grain once a year and stored it themselves.

If 50 farmers got together and bought through their local dealer western oats in bulk, saving insurance, storage rates, the price at Ottawa could be 84.6 cents a bushel instead of the 95.2 cents now paid.

One farmer said he bought locally grown oats at 75 cents a bushel.

(Translation):

That goes to prove that the Minister of Agriculture is unfamiliar with the situation in eastern Canada.

His remarks left us wondering what he had in mind. Later on we heard he had said in Saskatoon, as reported in the *Western Producer* for December 8, 1960, when he again referred to the conversion of Ontario land for reforestation purposes:

(Text):

The minister said much of this land could be converted to woodlots and tree farms and the farmer would get a bigger return per acre than he was doing at present. Mr. Hamilton conceded that growing trees was a slow process but suggested plans were afoot to enable farmers to obtain a good living in the interim.

(Translation):

After making such statements, the Minister of Agriculture stated again, as I said earlier:

For goodness' sake, let us stop pitting eastern farmers against western farmers, and the city people against farm people.

Mr. Chairman, I must point out that eastern farmers have no grievance against western farmers, no more than city people have against farm people. This notion exists only in the minister's mind.

[Mr. Boulanger.]

Whenever farm policies favourable to the western farmers have been implemented, their eastern counterparts have rejoiced.

Mr. Chairman, if we look closely at this resolution, we find that the government has merely sought to implement some recommendations advocated by the great Liberal party of the time, headed by the Right Hon. Louis St. Laurent.

In fact, in 1957 Mr. St. Laurent asked a Senate committee to investigate the matter of land use. The duties of that committee were as follows:

To investigate and submit a report on land use in Canada and on the steps required to ensure the best possible use of our land for the benefit of this country and the Canadian economy and, especially, in order to increase our farm output and the income of those taking part in it.

That committee on land use has been sitting for four years. Today those recommendations are taking concrete form in the resolution now under discussion.

In principle, the resolution contains all the components of a policy designed to increase the income of marginal farms.

However, if only the practical aspect of the question is taken into account, it is to be feared that this legislation is a mere smokescreen to conceal the government's incompetence. Is not the agricultural stabilization act itself a smokescreen?

Does not the preamble of that act state that:

It is expedient to enact a measure for the purpose of stabilizing the prices of agricultural commodities in order to assist the industry of agriculture to realize fair returns for its labour and investment, and to maintain a fair relationship between prices received by farmers and the costs of the goods and services that they buy, thus to provide farmers with a fair share of the national income.

And what happened since? Whereas the farm produce index reached 245.5 in 1958, on the basis of 100 for the average of the years 1935-1939, it fell to 242.9 in 1959, and 235.2 in August 1960.

Now, if we look at the cost index for goods and services acquired by our farmers, we see that it rose from 259.9 in 1958 to 269.5 in 1959, and 279.6 in August 1960.

Yet, we have heard fine speeches stating that this legislation would restore to our farmers their deserved share of the national revenue.

It is to be feared that, after a three and a half years' experience under a Conservative rule, the expected results fall somewhat short of the enthusiasm expressed by the new minister.