

Agricultural Prices Support Act

No one can produce hogs with any degree of assurance that he will obtain a reasonable return if hogs are going to drop as they did last year more than \$5 a hundred-weight within a period of four months. That amounted to \$8.60 for a 150-pound dressed hog. The Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Gardiner), who has raised hogs in the past and is no doubt raising them today, would agree with me, I think, that if a farmer made \$8.60 per hog after he had paid for any necessary labour, feed costs, depreciation on buildings, transportation and what-have-you, he would consider that he was making a good profit indeed. If that is the case, then the fact that hog prices dropped so greatly within a period of a few months means that the farmer lost money or in any event worked for nothing.

The minister is going to have \$200 million, which he may or may not use from time to time to support agricultural prices as he sees fit. Every time the Minister of Agriculture gets a little surplus of butter, as he would say, or a little surplus of cheese or whatever it happens to be, a cry goes up in the press across the country that the taxpayers of this nation are providing millions of dollars to store agricultural surpluses to keep prices artificially high, and that the taxpayer in the final analysis is the one who will suffer. These comments usually end with saying a free market is best and support prices should not be established under agricultural commodities.

I am going to say that if the government uses the whole \$200 million over a period of five years, and does not recoup a dollar from that \$200 million, the farmers are still entitled to that kind of support program. The farmers have contributed in various ways to put a floor under the standard of living of certain other sections of our community. I might refer to the Unemployment Insurance Act. It protects, to some extent at least, workers who find that their services are being offered in a falling market. Since 1941, under the Unemployment Insurance Act, the government has contributed a total of more than \$127 million; and in the estimates before parliament at the present time is a further \$23 million for unemployment insurance for the coming year. That makes a total of \$150 million that the taxpayers of Canada are paying into a fund to protect the workers of this nation. I support the unemployment insurance fund, and I believe the agricultural industry would also support a measure of that kind. But I want to point out at the same time that all that those engaged in agriculture are asking is that they be given a program similar to the unemployment

[Mr. Argue.]

insurance program, in that a minimum standard of living be guaranteed the primary producer.

I might point out that through tariffs a great many industries in Canada are protected at the expense of all the Canadian people, including farmers. We have tariffs on British woollen goods, British clothing made from wool, British boots and shoes, washing machines and bicycles, to mention only a few. The farmers of Canada and the people of Canada generally are making a contribution to keep certain industries in operation in this country. The tariffs have protected industry, and farmers ask that they too be given protection through floor prices in the marketing of their products.

I might also mention the fact that the government found it possible, from 1939 until February 1949, to pay to the iron and steel industry a total of more than \$51 million in subsidies. I hope the steel industry and other industries that have been protected through tariffs and subsidies will not set up a howl if it costs some money, and some real money, to protect the agricultural producers of our nation. I feel that the prosperity of agriculture in this nation is important not only to the farmers but to each and every occupational group in our country.

Whenever a recession or a depression occurs, farm prices are the first to fall, and with a fall in the level of farm prices, with a reduction in agricultural income, we soon witness widespread unemployment. Whenever the farmers of this nation cannot purchase the products manufactured in our factories, the workers are out of work, the factories are shut down and the whole Canadian nation is suffering. Therefore, in asking that the \$200 million be used in a way that will give farmers in the next few years a standard of living at least equal to that enjoyed from 1947 to 1949, I am asking for something that I believe is in the interests of all Canadian people.

One might go over some of the statements that have been made in the past as to whether or not we are losing our markets, and as to whether or not the government is to blame for what has happened. However, I do not propose to pursue that argument at this time. I want to remind the minister of the statement he repeated in introducing this measure this afternoon, namely, that when the world is hungry, when millions of people across the face of the earth are underfed, Canada has no business worrying about finding a place for surplus food, particularly when we are a nation of only 12 million people.

I want to tell the minister too that farmers did have a ceiling placed on farm products,