

Supply—Agriculture

its impartial judgment to determine whether or not the statement of my hon. friend is correct.

May I conclude by saying this to the Minister of Agriculture. His present attitude and that of this administration with regard to agriculture is different from the position taken by him and by all those who spoke on behalf of the Conservative party in the two election campaigns. There was going to be a new deal for agriculture. The Prime Minister, in the action he took as leader of the opposition in the amendments which had to do with parity prices, and in the speeches which were made about the fact that agriculture was not sharing in the economic prosperity of the nation, gave the farmers of this country cause to believe that they had, in hon. gentlemen opposite, the instrument by which they would see a new heaven and a new earth. Now that has not materialized.

My hon. friend pointed to an improvement in agricultural prices. He compared one year only with the current year. The way to test the prosperity of any group is not by comparing 1958 and 1957 but by comparing the present time with a period of years which will generally indicate the situation in Canadian agriculture. If that is done it will not support the contention made by the hon. gentleman or made last night by the Minister of Finance, who said that farm income in Canada had improved by a net of 24 per cent. My hon. friend nods approval of this statement. He confirms that statement, which we are now examining, as perhaps a demonstration of the exaggerated capacity of this government. The statement of the Minister of Finance last night in the budget speech that the agricultural position of the country had improved by a net of 24 per cent will not be supported by the facts, and in the course of these estimates we hope to be able to show.

I ask the Minister of Agriculture, then, to take what I have said in the spirit of constructive criticism, as the kind of criticism which he himself so generously and wisely, and sometimes so vigorously, gave to us when he was sitting on this side. I ask him to bear in mind the farmers not only of eastern Canada and western Canada but to think as well of the farmers of southwestern Ontario, who right now are concerned about the implementation of certain promises made by hon. gentlemen opposite, and who in the face of the coming season are worried about the cut in acreage, for instance in tomato production. As the hon. member for Middlesex West indicated the other day, they are concerned about whether or not it is true that

[Mr. Martin (Essex East).]

United States producers are shipping into Canada canned goods which are later designated as Canadian, thereby enjoying the advantage of the international freight rate as opposed to the domestic freight rate with its 17 per cent increase. I ask the Minister of Agriculture to consider that situation and indicate unequivocally, whether or not the government of which he is a member is now embarking upon a policy which will eventually mean withdrawal from the program of price supports.

The hon. member has indicated that exaggerated or dangerous surpluses will encourage that situation. He did not say that two years ago, and his statement is being interpreted by farmers all over Canada as meaning that the government proposes either to reduce the percentage of price supports or to abandon the policy altogether. I trust the Minister of Agriculture will be able some time in the course of this debate to address himself to these points.

Mr. Harkness: Mr. Chairman, I think this is now the fourth day that item No. 1 of the agricultural estimates has been under debate, and perhaps I should say a few words in reply to some of the questions raised during the course of the debate. I believe this is a case in which the first shall be last and the last shall be first, because I want to deal with the remarks of the hon. member for Essex East to begin with. I would like to commend him for the research he has apparently done in connection with agriculture. I am sure it will be extremely valuable to him and will give him a better idea than he has had heretofore in connection with agricultural problems.

I regret, however, that apparently his research has not been put to better use, because whilst he said he was offering constructive criticism, I think the speech he has just made could be used as a model for a political speech, a tub-thumping speech on one of the back concessions. Of that kind it was exceptionally good and I must compliment the hon. member on the excellence of his oratory and of his tub-thumping; but from the point of view of a critical examination of agriculture the speech just will not stand up. As a matter of fact it indicates how essentially little the hon. member has gained from his research into these matters.

I doubt, of course, whether he has actually gained as little knowledge as his speech would indicate, because the hon. member's ability is well known. I have great respect for it, and I am sure the reading and research he has done into the speeches which I and other people have made, into statistics and