

ture, but in terms of some new national policy with respect to agriculture little has come from him apart from the reiteration and reinforcement of existing legislation.

Looking at a speech that the minister made at the 53rd annual meeting of the Canadian Horticultural Council, which was delivered on March 3, 1975—I took this from the tall accumulation of speeches which the minister made—in that speech, when he was an after breakfast speaker, he spoke about some of the problems that affect agriculture, and he gave some statistics. On the second or third page of the epistle he delivered that day the minister said:

Now, I want to give you a few figures. They deserve some hard thinking. In 1972 Canadians grew 44 per cent of the fresh fruit you ate. That was down from 58 per cent in 1964. That's a 14 per cent drop in eight years.

He dealt with canned fruit. He said that we did better in canned fruit in 1964 than in 1972. In 1972, he said, there was a 16 per cent drop from 1964. He went on to give a number of figures which illustrated the fact that as a country we were consuming less and less of those things which we grow here, and as a result of that the industry finds itself in difficulty.

But did he offer a solution in that speech? No, he did not. He suggested a whole range of possibilities. He said that perhaps Canadians are buying more offshore vegetables, that perhaps our fruit lands are being bulldozed for highways and towns, and that perhaps there are some limitations in our climate. Mind you, the climate was the same in 1964. He said that perhaps our marketing systems and production scales are lagging behind those in other parts of the world. He asked the horticulturalists to think about it.

I ask the minister to think about it, because in the short period of time between 1964 and 1972 this minister and his predecessor have been in a position to deal with every one of those factors—except perhaps for the weather, and only the Minister of Finance (Mr. Turner) can deal with the weather—that affect the operation of agriculture. This is the same thing that he has done with respect to hogs, beef and every other agricultural commodity. He has pointed out the problems very clearly, but what he has not said is what he intends to do about them.

As the hon. member for Qu'Appelle-Moose Mountain said, it is unfair to credit this piece of legislation anything more in terms of improvement than the text of the bill entitles it to have. As the hon. member said, it is really an adjunct or an addition to a policy that was formed under the Conservative government in 1958. So it is not fair to mislead in that sense of the word.

There are agriculturalists in my community who say of the minister that he is a great fellow and that he tells them everything that is wrong, that he gives them hope because at least he recognizes the problems. They say they are getting higher prices for their produce now but they are paying more for fuel, more for binder twine, more for machinery, fertilizer, feed, for all their investments which are large, and higher interest charges at the bank. Their profits are going down. That is the problem facing farmers, and that is the problem to which the minister should address himself.

Agricultural Stabilization Act

The minister cannot address himself to that problem alone. He requires the co-operation of his colleagues in the government, and perhaps he is not getting it. Nothing concrete can be done to deal with problems affecting farmers, and therefore affecting consumers, until something is done by the government at least to begin the attack on the inflation which affects this country.

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My heart goes out to farmers in my constituency, farmers in Ontario, and farmers in Canada generally who are suffering under this system whereby the harder they work the less they earn in terms of their investment simply because the government of this day has refused to attack the problem of inflation. The methods the government has used are the methods of trying to attempt a consensus, to do indirectly what it does not have the courage or the guts to do directly, trying to impose a voluntary incomes policy on the people of Canada. This is what the government is trying to do, and we have the results of it today in the silence on the Treasury Benches.

The farmer has a real problem. The minister gave a speech to the annual meeting of the Harrow and Colchester South Chamber of Commerce at Harrow, Ontario, on Tuesday, March 4, 1975, and in that speech he summed up the difficulties facing farmers. Many people should know about these difficulties, people who somehow think that agriculture begins at the refrigerator door. It does not begin there, and all of us know that.

On page 4 of that particular epistle the minister said:

Look at the date from the last census. In 1970, the average income of Canada's plumbers was over \$8,000. Doctors earned an average of nearly \$28,000. Structural steelworkers earned over \$8,000. Sales clerks were paid an average of \$4,700. Yet farmers grossed an average of \$3,800.

I ask the minister why? If that is the case with respect to farmers, what in the devil has the minister been doing about it since he came into that portfolio except talk about it? What has the government been doing about it since it took office in 1963? Nothing. Nothing, and that is the thing practicing agriculturalists in this country—using the minister's own statistics—look at, when they ask themselves about all of the speeches the minister has made and what they really mean.

There is a challenge to agriculture, and perhaps the minister should move in the direction of meeting the challenge. The challenge is keeping people on the land and encouraging them to stay on the land, to give encouragement in real terms to stay on the land with real returns to them. That is the first challenge. The second challenge is to ensure that young people are encouraged to come on to the land. I look at this litany of programs, and I look at the number of farmers going out of business.

I consider the number of auction sales advertised in the weekly newspapers, and I cast that against the problem of rising prices for food for the consumer, and the duty we have in a civilized and conscientious society of feeding a starving world, and I ask myself whether this minister is prepared to put before the farmers of this country the new tools, the new policies and the new programs which will allow the farmers of Canada to do what they want to do—make a reasonable living from farming, have a reasonable