

Agricultural Products Act

culture. His statement is found in *Hansard* of February 28, 1947, at page 929, and reads:

The objective of the resolution and of the legislation based upon it would be to continue in effect the powers we had been given during the war under the War Measures Act, through the different orders in council.

In other words, Mr. Speaker, the purpose of the act was to continue—and that is the principle of it—the orders in council which were in force during the war. In passing the act again the principle, of course, is the same, to carry forward these wartime orders in council. At the time the act was first passed there was a long discussion as to the necessity for it. The minister argued very strongly that the farmers of Canada wanted the act, that they were very much in favour of it, and furthermore that it would give them stability in their markets. I shall return to the question of stability later. At that time we in this party opposed the act on the ground that it gave the minister more or less complete control over the marketing of all farm products, except wheat, which was already controlled by the wheat board act. It puts him in the position where he could state the price a farmer was to receive for any product, the time and manner of delivery, and anything else along that line. I maintained at that time and still maintain that the farmers should have the right to determine these things for themselves, particularly through producer boards. I objected then, and I object now, to the dictatorial powers of compulsion vested in the minister by this act. When this bill was first introduced the minister attempted to play down that angle of it, as he is doing at the present time. He said he was only going to exercise those powers to the extent necessary to fill our contracts with Great Britain. However, he did admit the powers of compulsion given to him, and that is shown in his remarks at page 1388 of *Hansard* for March 14, 1947, where he said:

Why were these orders in council brought in, in the first instance? They were brought in so as to make it possible for the government, by compulsion—

Note those words.

—by compulsion to take farm products and to send them to Great Britain for the purpose of assisting in the prosecution of the war . . .

That is quite correct; that is why they were brought in. That reason, however—to permit the government to take the food and send it to Great Britain to enable her to continue the prosecution of the war—no longer exists and has not existed for some years. Nevertheless the minister still wants to exercise these powers, and he now advances a different reason. Actually, Mr. Speaker, the powers

[Mr. Harkness.]

given the government, under this and other so-called emergency legislation with which we have been dealing for the past week or so, have been used by the government to bedevil and entirely confuse the economic situation in this country, particularly in regard to agriculture. The result is that farmers are now angry and bewildered over the way their products have been handled and the prices they have received for them. To put it shortly, they resent the manner in which they have been pushed around, and I do not wonder at it. At the present time prices are falling, and they see the threat of a return to the desperate situation they were in during the thirties, when their products could not be sold at all. For that reason they are particularly alarmed over the future, and are looking for some assurance that as far as their markets are concerned that future will be secured in some way. The farmers of this country believe, and correctly, that the government has botched their affairs in a frightful manner. They accepted much less than world prices for many of their products, on the promise given by this government that there would be stability both in regard to markets and in regard to prices. Stability is just what the farmers have not obtained, in spite of the sacrifices they made to secure it.

In 1947 the minister tried to sell this bill to the house and the country on the argument of stability. Hon. members will notice that we do not hear nearly so much about stability at the present time. The minister no longer makes that his chief argument, as he did in 1947. At that time he made quite definite promises to the farmers of this country as to what this bill would do in the way of stability, and how it would help keep the British market for them. At page 1393 of *Hansard* for 1947 the minister had this to say:

One of the ways in which we hope to be able to do it—

That is, secure stability, and so on.

—is to retain, for so long as it is essential to do so, the agreements with Britain which we have covering the marketing of farm products which we can see will be surplus for the years that are ahead of us that will assure to us the British market for the surplus production of farms in this country.

Then, on the next page:

—we have been supplying food to Britain at a lower cost—as every member in this house has been saying, some of them agreeing with it and some of them disagreeing—than other people in the world have been supplying it up to the present time. And I say quite candidly that we expect that over the entire period of the three or four years during which these contracts last we shall have a reasonable return as compared with other peoples in the world from that market which we believe to be our best market, our most secure market, and the one in which we have the best chance over a long period of time of being paid for our commodities.