

*Farm Products Marketing Agencies Bill*

[Translation]

**Mr. Roch La Salle (Joliette):** Mr. Speaker, I very much appreciate the opportunity I have to express my views on this bill which in my opinion is one of the most important ever introduced in the House in the last three years. I think all hon. members will realize that we needed legislation that could alleviate the difficulties agriculture has been facing for many years, that means realistic legislation.

In fact, it seems to me that all hon. members intend to help our farmers as much as possible. Since lack of planning has been deplored, the government prepared Bill C-176. And, having examined this bill long enough, I feel the government probably will do Canadian producers a service.

I believe in the merits of this bill and I do not hesitate to say that ever since I was elected to this House, agricultural groups in my constituency have been in favour of legislation designed to control production. Considering the experience that Canadian producers have had with this policy of supply and demand, which has put the farming community through ups and downs, without ensuring price stability for consumers, I think it is easy enough to recognize that a piece of legislation such as Bill C-176 will prove most beneficial to the people.

Of course, after 18 months, you try to introduce some amendments. Yet I am under the impression that this bill was adequately discussed in committee. At this stage, we could have saved time and legislated seriously, for the benefit of farmers.

• (9:00 p.m.)

Like many others, I promised the farmers I would fight for the interests of those who live in my riding, not for the sake of a few individuals, but for the good of a community. I will ask the government to keep on doing whatever is necessary to offer the farmers the service that Bill C-276 represents.

I say "service", Mr. Speaker, because taking into account the amendments designed to reduce the scope of the bill, we know full well that this bill to establish a national council, which provides adequate representation of agricultural leaders on that council, previous consultations with the representatives of the ten provinces—something we have not witnessed often in this country—to discuss quotas, distribution of national production in terms of each province, and marketing, to the extent where it would be favorable to the majority of the producers of a given commodity, offers the solution to all the problems.

All the worries of the hon. members who object against that legislation are dispelled.

In my opinion, it is clearly defined in page 8 of the bill and I quote:

(2) The Council, in reporting to the Minister under subsection (1), shall not recommend the establishment of an agency in respect of a farm product or farm products or the broadening of the authority of an existing agency by vesting it with powers in relation to a farm product or farm products unless it is satisfied that a majority of the producers of the farm product or of each of the farm products in Canada or in the region of Canada to which the recommendation relates is in favour of such action.

Mr. Speaker, it seems to me quite clear. If Bill C-176 is a service made available by the government to farmers who may use it according to their needs, it would indeed be unfortunate if the government would amend the bill and exclude some products, because once again the legislation does not compel farmers to accept quotas. Thus the farmers will be able to take advantage of the legislation if they so desire.

I think that we could not, except through this bill, achieve stability in the interest of the agricultural class, and stability of prices, which is also necessary, cannot be achieved without production control.

The policy of supply and demand that some would like to keep has nonetheless brought about great difficulties and we know too well today overproduction in various fields to believe that this policy is still valid today.

I was listening a short while ago to the hon. member for Prince Edward-Hastings (Mr. Hees) who was talking about the good policy of the Progressive Conservative government when it was in power. I would like to believe that the Progressive Conservative party had an excellent agricultural policy—it would be dishonest for me to claim the contrary—but times have changed and difficulties have not decreased. A new act is also desirable.

The government feels that Bill C-176 could solve the problems now facing the farmers.

Bill C-176, as I was saying, leaves the decision up to the majority. I come back to this because I believe that this paragraph is important. Why exclude some products? When we know very well that some day these categories of producers will perhaps need this legislation which will be there for them to use. Once again, they will be free to use it or not.

Some mention was made of difficulties between provinces. It was given to understand that this would bring about confrontations. On the contrary, without Bill C-176, we have known such difficulties, such trade barriers between the provinces. On the contrary, I think it is wrong to claim that Bill C-176 will bring about these problems.

Worries were also expressed about foreign competition which could be too rough. Having a National Council would prove an ideal way, I think, to make the minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce (Mr. Pepin) aware of the need to limit certain imports from time to time, but I also think that the National Council, created in accordance with Bill C-176, would be the best channel to reach the responsible minister.

There was also concern about the disappearance of some small producers, and the same hon. member who said that Bill C-176 was going to drive many into the ground admitted at the same time that for ten years now we have seen thousands of them cease their operations. Yet Bill C-176 was not in force during the last ten years.

So it is foolish, I think, to bring in such an ambiguous argument.

I believe rather that the small producer will one day benefit from the establishment of production quotas and will have the assurance of selling his production at a reasonable price, which will encourage him to pursue his farming career. The big corporation which can only too easily assimilate small producers will have a harder time