

Grain—Deficiency Payments

Ottawa in the month of May. They acknowledged the difficult problems confronting the government, but they reminded the government that during the elections of 1957 and 1958 they had given the farmers of Canada reason to believe that given the opportunity of forming a government they would resolve many agricultural problems.

The Minister of Trade and Commerce (Mr. Churchill) was among those who gave such assurances in his own city of Winnipeg and throughout western Canada during the last election. On March 15 last the Prime Minister is reported as having promised that some consideration would be given to making deficiency payments on wheat, oats and barley to growers so that their returns might bear a fair relationship to production costs. That was the statement made by the right hon. gentleman who heads the government which is now being asked to explain this policy in answer to submissions made to the farmers' union in the month of May last. Is it unreasonable now, on this the 15th day of July, for members of parliament on this side to ask the government of the day what its policy is with regard to the various demands made by the farmers' union? Is it unreasonable to ask the Minister of Trade and Commerce what the attitude of this government is with regard to the question of deficiency payments? Is it unreasonable to ask the Minister of Trade and Commerce, who regards this apparently as a laughing matter—

Mr. Churchill: I am laughing at the notes you are passing back and forth.

Mr. Martin (Essex East): You are going to be laughing in a few moments—

Mr. Churchill: You have not got your own speech, that's all.

Mr. Martin (Essex East): What is the attitude of this government, having promised the people of Canada that if elected they would call parliament in September and resolve these problems? And now two months after those requests were made by the farmers' union the Minister of Trade and Commerce sits in his place and is not able to answer any questions from this side of the house as to the request made by the farmers—

Mr. Churchill: I am listening to you, give me a chance.

Mr. Martin (Essex East): Hon. gentlemen opposite promised the farmers of this country price support at fixed and declared figures. They introduced an act last session which was supposed to be a charter as a result of which farmers would be extricated from their economic difficulties, and that was based on farm legislation which had been introduced

by the previous government. We were told there would be firm prices for this and for that. To take an example, the Minister of Agriculture announced there would be a floor price of \$2.10 for soybeans. Let us see whether or not we have a floor price of \$2.10 for soybeans. When the Minister of Agriculture announced that policy, every farmer in this country, certainly in those areas particularly concerned, believed there would be a floor price of \$2.10 for that particular commodity. But there is no such floor price of \$2.10—

Mr. Speaker: As I understood the grievance which is under consideration at this moment, and to speak on which I gave the hon. gentleman the floor when there were others who wished to speak, and as enunciated by the hon. member for Assiniboia (Mr. Argue) related to deficiency payments—

Mr. Martin (Essex East): I was just seeking to illustrate how the policy of support prices in the form of deficiency payments in respect to one particular subject has operated under the present administration. The hon. member for Assiniboia has said we are asking for a declaration of policy by the government with regard to deficiency payments, that is, with respect to a policy which has not yet been announced. I am now dealing with the technique, with the administrative machinery of the operations of this government with regard to deficiency payments already announced with regard to other commodities, and I submit with much confidence that surely it is within the relevancy of debate that I should be able to indicate what this government is doing with regard to floor prices—

Mr. Speaker: I am, perhaps, even less familiar with agriculture than the hon. member who has the floor but, with respect, I would suggest that he has gone off on to support prices which seems to me something different from deficiency payments.

Mr. Martin (Essex East): All I can say is that though I have a high regard for you I can well understand that your own acknowledged limitations on this subject have not afforded your Honour the opportunity of following the refinements of my argument.

However, if you take the position that I am not able to discuss floor prices generally, I will have to bow to your ruling except to say that there will be an opportunity for dealing, not only with the policy of this government in relation to deficiency payments to western producers but also with regard to such things as soybeans, Ontario wheat, and many other matters which are of great concern to the farmers of this country.