

Farm Credit Act

tainly succeed in further improving the situation somewhat. It will gradually improve. We cannot expect drastic changes because too many production units are involved in farming. Various attempts were made to further help agriculture, for instance, through the Farm Products Marketing Council, and we know how difficult it was to have this legislation passed and put into our statute books. We are slowly building something and within a few years, our agriculture will be greatly improved, and we shall certainly be in a position to say that the Canadian government has introduced a long term agricultural policy, and that our farmers are considered as full-fledged citizens.

Several problems may give rise to some criticisms voiced by our friends of the opposition.

• (1740)

Last week Farm Credit Corporation chairman Owen appeared before the agriculture committee. Our friends opposite questioned him at length and one of our colleagues tried to emphasize the fact that farming conditions in Quebec were much better than elsewhere in Canada, quoting the fact that only 6 per cent of loans granted by the Farm Credit Corporation were in arrears, that is only 6 per cent of Quebec borrowers were behind with their reimbursement in comparison with 21, 24 and 25 per cent in the three Prairie provinces. They then drew the following conclusion: farming conditions in Quebec are clearly better than in the Prairies.

Mr. Speaker, it is a rather hasty analysis of the statistics, since in Quebec the circumstances are different; there is a Farm Credit Bureau which enables farmers to obtain credit at better terms. That is why very few Quebec farmers borrow under the terms of that federal act. Only big farmers do so in Quebec because they can then get additional amounts, greater than those granted by the province.

Quebec farmers do not have to borrow large amounts at the provincial level. Those who have large farms—and they are growing in number—borrow at the federal level. According to the statistics, \$18 million were loaned last year to Quebec farmers, because there too farms are being regrouped. People need larger amounts of money and therefore turn in increasing numbers to federal sources of credit. That, in spite of our good friend, the hon. Mr. Toupin of Quebec, who would have us hand over all those amounts of money, that he might manage it and be sole judge in the matter.

Is the situation of the western farmer as critical as some would claim? I should like to quote a table published on page 37 of the report of the Farm Credit Corporation which gives the index of Canadian farm land values per acre, by province, during the last 20 years.

I shall not read the whole table, Mr. Speaker, but I shall give an idea of the increase in the value of agricultural properties.

In British Columbia, for instance, in 1951, one acre of land was worth an average of \$110. In 1970, or 20 years later, it was worth \$286.

In Alberta, for the same years, the figures were \$112 then and \$288 now.

In Saskatchewan, \$117 in 1951 and \$292 now.

[Mr. Lessard (Lac-Saint-Jean).]

In Manitoba, \$117 also, and \$233 now.

In Ontario, where a truly specific problem exists, land was worth \$127 an acre in 1951 and after a fantastic leap it was worth \$435 an acre in 1970.

In Quebec, from \$125 there has been an increase to \$249.

In New Brunswick, from \$116 to \$222.

In Nova Scotia, from \$112 to \$214.

In Prince Edward Island, from \$115 to \$196.

So, one can see that there is an increase in the value of the acre of land. One can see that Western farmers of course are sitting on a larger fortune than farmers in Ontario, the Maritime provinces and Quebec because their lands are much smaller which brings from our honorable colleague for Crowfoot (Mr. Horner) the comment that Western farmers live in poverty and die rich. It may be true that they live in poverty,—I am not in a position to judge—but I doubt if all of them live like the poor. When considering reports and the standard of living of Westerners, one realizes that some of them are drawing very good incomes.

So I am not prepared to say that they all live in poverty. But, Mr. Speaker, one thing is certain: they die a lot richer than farmers in the Maritimes and Quebec because of a considerably higher appreciation.

Only yesterday, I read in a newspaper that Americans are presently buying land in southern Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Alberta for twice the price normally asked on the local market. Therefore, the reason why land out West is worth that much, is because it can be put into production. Besides, it is said that it has value as an investment. If such is the case, the land situation in the Prairies is not as bad as we are led to believe.

Farmers are doing a disservice to agriculture in painting everything in such dark colours, in Canada, agriculture is rather healthy and it will become healthier in as much as we work together toward its improvement. I think this is the purpose of this bill and we will certainly achieve it with the co-operation of all members.

• (1750)

[English]

Mr. J. H. Horner (Crowfoot): Mr. Speaker, one finds oneself a little bit amused by the two tables which the hon. member for Lac-Saint-Jean (M. Lessard) used in defence of his argument. One of them had a great deal to do with production. He stressed that in such and such a period of time production was so much, but that under the Liberals in recent years production was so much more. He fails to take into consideration that weather has a lot to do with production. Further, in recent years farmers have been quick to use all the advanced technology to increase production, such as more efficient use of fertilizer, better seeding methods, and better farming methods in general. This all would tend to show that in latter years production has increased.

The hon. member then quoted from another table taken from the document on farm credit and related statistics put out by the DBS. It is to be found at page 37 of that document, and deals with the value of land. But he fails to realize that inflation plays a great part in the value of