

Agricultural Products Board

I know there are many people today who object to this kind of legislation. They say it is an interference with private business. But those very people who make that charge believe in insurance—and this is nothing more or less than a form of insurance. It is insurance against an undue fall in agricultural prices. And, mind you, it is insurance for which the farmers have already paid the premium, and a very heavy premium at that. Do not let anyone forget that in the depression years the farmers were taking prices far below the cost of production. They were told time and again they could not expect to get more than the world price. Yet when prices rose steeply during the war, price ceilings were placed on farm products. The government asked the farmers to take less than they might otherwise receive, and all this was done in the name of stabilization. The government promised that if the farmers accepted those prices, then the government would maintain the prices of agricultural products at a fair level after the war. While taking those lower prices the farmers lost millions upon millions of dollars. That is why I say they have paid their insurance premium for the insurance this measure provides.

Today we are told there is danger of serious starvation and famine conditions in many parts of the world, unless we can maintain production at a high level. We are told that today the increase in production is barely keeping pace with the increase in population. The food and agriculture organization have issued warnings time and again, and have stressed the fact that every nation must do everything in its power to maintain production at a high level. Yet today in Canada we find the farm population is decreasing. The younger people are leaving the farms and going to the cities, because they find that in the cities the wages are higher and the way of living is generally speaking easier. They have many conveniences in the cities that they do not have on the farms. Therefore we are having a great deal of difficulty in keeping the younger people on the farms. Today we find many farms being operated by people well along in years. One may well ask what will happen in the future, unless we can improve conditions on the farm so the young people will be willing to stay there.

If we want to keep food production at the highest level, then I think we must ensure that the increase in production in the future is not used as an excuse to force the prices of agricultural products down, as has been done so many times in the past. That has been the history of agricultural prices. Whenever we have had reserves of food the prices of commodities have gone down. And so the farmers have

actually been discouraged from increasing their production because they have realized that if they did so they would be forcing prices down.

This measure, I believe, provides a means whereby the prices of farm products may be maintained. It provides a method whereby in the event of a surplus the government may make purchases, and either dispose of such surplus to foreign nations, or store it, or process it. I believe if the government utilizes this measure as it can be utilized, it could very well safeguard against any serious fall in prices. A surplus would then become a blessing and would be used in a year of scarcity to maintain the standard of living. As I say, the machinery is there. Most people are afraid, however, that the government will not make effective use of it in time of need.

One of the reasons for this fear lies in certain press statements we read. I must admit I was concerned by a statement that appeared in the *Ottawa Citizen* of December 6. This was headed "Government May Continue Food Floors," and it went on to say:

Agriculture Minister Gardiner wound up a two-day federal-provincial agricultural conference last night with the hint that the government is considering continuation of price support for eggs, butter and bacon in 1952.

Why the hint? That implies definitely that it is possible the government may not continue floors. Surely we should be able to feel confident under this legislation that floors will be continued next year. However, according to this, it is just possible that floors will be continued. No assurance is given. If this legislation means anything every farmer should feel confident that next year and during future years these floors will be in existence. It should not require a statement from the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Gardiner) that the floors will be continued next year. If the formula outlined by the minister was placed in the Agricultural Prices Support Act all fear or distrust would be wiped out and we would know that this legislation really means what it appears to say.

Mr. Gardiner: Mr. Speaker, I am speaking on the amendment, which has not yet been ruled out of order.

Mr. Knowles: It was not ruled out the last time it was moved.

Mr. Gardiner: It will probably be voted out if it is not ruled out.

Mr. Knowles: No doubt. It was voted down before, with the minister's help.

Mr. Gardiner: The amendment reads:

That Bill No. 18 be not now read a second time but that it be resolved that in the opinion of this house consideration should be given to the intro-