

*Farm Prices*

Mr. J. L. DOUGLAS (Queens): Since I represent a constituency in a province which is largely agricultural I am naturally interested in this legislation supporting farm prices. It is essential that the farmer, upon whom we depend to so large an extent, should be protected from any collapse of prices of his marketable products during the readjustment period following the war. Through the wisdom of the government in its price ceiling and other measures during the past few years, farm prices have not become unreasonably high, in fact, scarcely high enough to offset, in some instances, the additional cost of production. In some instances the farmers have paid twenty-five per cent more in wages than in former years; nevertheless, despite ten years of low farm prices which prevailed prior to 1941, the farmers to-day are in better financial circumstances. This measure introduced to support the farmer up to or about the level of production is vital to the welfare of the dominion as a whole. It is a broad one that requires careful consideration, because cost of production varies in the different provinces. In Prince Edward Island we are subject to heavy freight rates and other handicaps not found except in a province separated from the mainland. Our principal marketing crops are potatoes, both seed and table stock; dairy products, hogs, poultry and eggs. Fish, of course, will be dealt with in another important bill.

The knowledge and experience I have gained from both farming and marketing convinces me that there is no other way by which we can protect the producer in the annual outlay of cash necessary to maintain production than by establishing a minimum price under the direction of a board so that he will not be made bankrupt. A board wisely constituted should be able to protect both the farmer and the government, or the consolidated revenue fund. This fund should be sufficient to meet all such needs.

For some time there will be a large demand for most food products. This demand will ensure at least a price equal to any floor that may be set. Other farm products which vary greatly in yield one year with another from the same acreage are, in years of heavy yield, sold at low prices. Take potatoes, for instance, a crop that varies greatly, depending on the weather and the infestation of fungus disease. In Prince Edward Island potatoes constitute our main cash crop. We produce a good quality of both seed and table stock, and without a reasonable revenue from this crop our farmers are not prosperous. Hon. members know that eighty per cent of the certified seed potatoes are produced in

[Mr. Diefenbaker.]

Prince Edward Island. The production of those potatoes requires special and scientific methods, which are more expensive than growing ordinary table stock potatoes. Production in Prince Edward Island, as in other provinces, has been increased twenty-five to thirty per cent. This is remarkable, especially in my own province where out of a population of 95,000 people 12,000 of our young men and women have enlisted in the armed forces, probably the highest percentage of all of Canada. The fathers and mothers at home have worked long hours, most of them from daylight to dark, to meet the needs of producing more food.

Since transportation is linked closely with production, we in Prince Edward Island are handicapped by ice conditions in the Northumberland strait in certain months of the year. February and March are the months in which the greatest difficulty is experienced. We hope that when the new car ferry, which is under construction, is brought into service in a few months' time it will improve the service between our province and the mainland. Our twenty-nine year old car ferry, which was built in Newcastle-on-Tyne, where many great ships are built, has done wonderful work. A great deal of credit is due to the crew who in some instances work day and night to keep the freight moving.

The people of my province have faith in the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Gardiner) and in his department, which has dealt fairly with all provinces. We appreciate the relief he has given us in the subventions on fertilizer and feed, the bonuses paid on dairy products, and so on, which, I am sure, all our people in that business appreciate.

It would be foolish for me or for anyone else to attempt to outline what minimum prices should be set for the various products, and as I have already said, a wisely constituted board will arrive at those conclusions. I wish to say, in conclusion, that I most heartily endorse the principles of the bill.

Mr. J. H. BLACKMORE (Lethbridge): The principle underlying this bill is apparently the one that it is the duty and responsibility of the federal government of Canada to establish and maintain equitable and stable prices for agricultural products. That principle is sound. Apparently the technique involved in this bill is that of taxing the money from the people of Canada in order to attain the stable and equitable price level. That principle is unsound.

On the whole one must support the bill because the objective of attaining stable and equitable prices is so important that one