

Supply—Agriculture

Mr. Horner (Acadia): Would the hon. member permit a question?

Mr. Argue: Certainly.

Mr. Horner (Acadia): Is he aware of the fact that the Alberta farmers and the Saskatchewan farmers both voted separately on the question of livestock marketing boards and in both provinces the proposal was defeated? I would say that is the democratic method.

Mr. Argue: My reactionary young friend, who is very quick to point out any move affecting the free enterprise system that he favours so much, should know that a great many of the producers who did not support the legislation did so not because they do not believe in that type of legislation but because they felt that within the confines of a province it could not be made effective. What I am advocating today is national legislation.

The second type of national legislation that I put forward to the minister as something that is needed for the welfare of the agricultural industry is a board of livestock commissioners to establish fair grades and to police and enforce those grades, or better still a board to a board of agricultural products commissioners that would be able to control in a real way the grading of agricultural products so as to ensure that producers are given fair and proper grades. I do not think that the legislation in effect today is operating as effectively as it should.

The criticism has been prevalent for many years—it is not new—that the established floor prices for eggs are not passed on to the producers. There has been evidence this year that there is a combine in the buying of eggs and the establishment of prices for various grades. I think that the agricultural prices stabilization board and therefore the government have some responsibility in this regard because, as I understand the situation, the board buys eggs only in carload lots comprising some 300 cases of eggs in one purchase.

Mr. Harkness: Would the hon. member permit a question?

Mr. Argue: Surely.

Mr. Harkness: If he has any evidence of a monopoly in the buying of eggs, has he given it to the Department of Justice or to any other government department where the matter can be investigated?

Mr. Argue: The answer is yes. I have brought it to the attention of the Minister of Justice. I think the Minister of Agriculture knows what I am talking about. If he wants to say he does not, it is his right to do so.

[Mr. Argue.]

Mr. Harkness: If the hon. member will permit me, I should like to point out that most of this was done by co-operatives in western Canada. In other words, they got together in order to set a price for eggs. He says that there is a monopoly. As he knows, most of the eggs in Saskatchewan, Alberta and Manitoba are handled by farmer co-operatives.

Mr. Argue: The minister is shifting his ground a little—

Mr. Harkness: Oh, no.

Mr. Argue:—and almost but not quite admitting that it has been brought to his attention.

Mr. Harkness: I have mentioned it myself.

Mr. Argue: All right. Then he knows what I am talking about. He asks if I have brought it to the attention of the Minister of Justice. I have in the house on the orders of the day. I know and the minister knows that this situation was brought to his attention and to the attention of the board and in the particular case I have in mind corrective action was taken as I am certain the minister is aware.

Mr. Harkness: I took it myself right away.

Mr. Argue: All right. Then why did the minister question my initial statement as though it was something new out of the sky and I had not brought it to the attention of the proper authorities?

Mr. Harkness: If the hon. member will permit me, in view of the fact that this was chiefly done by the farmers' co-operatives I thought he was referring to something else altogether. I think I should also say in fairness to these people that I think they did it entirely in ignorance of the fact that they were contravening any law.

Mr. Argue: I do not know who the members are of the western produce association and I would be very grateful if the minister would give me that information. I have been endeavouring to find out from the departments of government and that information, so I am told, is not available. Mind you, I think the minister has it.

Mr. Harkness: I do not know.

Mr. Argue: First he tells me that it is mainly the co-operatives and now he has not got the information. I do not know which it is, but I am not talking about co-operatives. I am talking about the members, whoever they may be and I do not know who they are, of the western produce association which it is alleged in certain instances formed a combine in the purchase of eggs. The suggestion I wish to make is