

*Supply—Agriculture*

Progress is also a factor which forces us to increase production costs. In fact, quite recently—I would not like to criticize the legislation passed by the house—we saw an increase in the interest rate on credit made available to farmers, which is another thing that might increase production costs.

Because of the competition from products coming from countries which produce at a lower cost, it becomes more and more difficult for the farmers to hold on without the help of the governments. That is why I think it is urgent for the state to assume fully its responsibilities and to reform our system so that it will take into account the needs of the farmers who will just have to give up their farms to allow for the changeover from family farming to commercial farming.

Let us take, for instance, the large number of dairy producers who had to give up their production last year and this year. An even larger number might have to do the same thing next year. What will happen to them? Do we really have the right to forget about them without giving any thought to their fate and that of their dependants?

I know that the main task of the Canadian Dairy Commission is not to find jobs for all the farmers who have to give up their farms for one reason or another, but it is a fact just the same that, because of the too severe regulations of that commission, which are necessary, I agree, to try to keep the dairy industry alive in Canada, the producers are faced with very serious problems. That is why I think it is urgent to reform our economic system as soon as possible in order to develop to a greater extent industries in rural centres, to absorb that manpower that will help to create goods of all kinds to meet the needs of the people in Canada and also those of people in underdeveloped countries.

Increasing the estimates of the Department of Agriculture would surely be a very good investment, because that would strengthen that sector of the economy and automatically create more jobs, because when agriculture is doing well, when agriculture can survive in a normal way, the farmers are better able to absorb the manpower available on the spot.

● (5:00 p.m.)

I have on hand some statistics, which seem to be accurate enough, to the effect that in the city of Montreal there are 105,800 families, that is 55.6 per cent of the total number, that are destitute. Now, if those figures are accurate, they represent 1,062,000 persons.

In my opinion, it is in the interest of the whole nation to take all the necessary and conceivable means in order to try to solve the agricultural problem, whether in western or eastern Canada, so as to prevent the Canadian people, those who have to give up farming for want of income, from going to our cities and increasing the number of the poor who thus become a burden of the state.

When all the efforts have actually been concentrated, in the Canadian Dairy Commission, the Farm Loan Board or the Board of Grain Commissioners and in all other government services, when we have succeeded in taking our bearings, we will have to make sure that the settlement of a problem in a certain area will not create others in other areas. This is why I think that we will have to work increasingly together, in order to avoid, when some action is taken, creating a problem elsewhere. This is what is going on at the present time unfortunately and I do not want to blame the minister nor the government agencies.

The Canadian Dairy Commission, for example, must assume its responsibilities. I understand the problem quite well and I congratulate the commissioners for discharging their responsibilities so well. However, I would like to call the attention of the minister to a matter which does not come under the jurisdiction of the Canadian Dairy Commission, that is the estimates available to them. Among other responsibilities, the commission must forecast the requirements of the Canadian market and make the distribution while considering the estimates made available by the minister. Mr. Chairman, I am convinced of one thing: if we really want to make an effective contribution to solve the problems of our agriculture, it will be necessary, when preparing the estimates of the Department of Agriculture for 1969-70, to consider seriously giving it a bigger share of the public monies of Canada, so that farmers will get better prices and the agricultural industry will remain efficient and will help solve other problems in other sectors, by providing employment opportunities and thus fighting unemployment.

I know that the government is now making efforts to help those who are forced to leave the agricultural field by making available to them retraining courses which will facilitate their readjustment to other areas of the economy. However, this is not enough. We should do a lot more in that direction.