

Farm Prices

power is necessary. The governments of this country can never absolve themselves of the guilt of having seen want and privation in the midst of a land which has the potential capacity to produce so much, and which in the past has produced so much. The fact that we could, in wheat alone, produce ten times as much as the Canadian people could consume in a year and still have a large number of young people, of older people, and generally those in the lower income groups actually suffering from want of food, never knowing what it was to have sufficient bread, is something which speaks for itself.

The minister put some valuable figures on the record this morning to show fluctuations in farm prices, but his figures were largely those which revealed wholesale prices. I should like to put on some figures to show exactly what happened to the farmer's income—not wholesale prices, but the farmer's income. His net income for a period of years, as recorded in the national income study prepared by the commission on dominion-provincial relations, and given in appendix 4, table VIII C. at page 86 of the report follows. This relates to our own province of Saskatchewan, for individual enterprises, showing income so far as agriculture was concerned. This is the net income for agriculture after we have taken out cash expenses, income in kind and depreciation on buildings and equipment.

In 1926 Saskatchewan's income was \$203.8 million, 1927, 184.2; 1928, 228.4; 1929, 158.1; 1930, 33.9. In 1931 it was minus \$8.1 million, which meant that the people engaged in agriculture in that province received \$8 million less than operating costs, in other words there was a drop of 104 per cent between 1926 and 1931. It continued in the minus column, so that in 1932 it was minus 7.4; in 1933, 3.5 million; in 1934 it had improved to a net income of 20.1 million; in 1935 it was 35.5; and in 1936 it was 60.2. But even in 1937 it had only reached a net income of 22.7, about ten per cent of what it was in the year 1926, and during that period the depression had continued. The actual living conditions were so bad that the population of Saskatchewan had deteriorated. It was the one province in the whole dominion where the population had actually decreased as shown by the census of 1931 and the census of 1941.

The minister clearly demonstrated to us today that he and his department understand the condition of the farmer. They know what the farmer's income is; they understand his cost of production; they know what the plight of the farmer is and apparently they know a very great deal about the causes of

that plight. But the people of Canada are asking this question: why has not this been remedied before? One of the Liberal members said to-day that we had learned a great deal during the war about these things. The fact is that we knew these things before the war; and the steps now proposed could have been and should have been taken before the war. We can only regret that these things did not come sooner.

There are many features of the bill which might result in the bill meaning absolutely nothing. In the first place, the board when appointed only sits during the pleasure of the governor in council. On the face of it—

Mr. GARDINER: The appointments are to be at the pleasure of the governor in council. The hon. member said the board only sits.

Mr. CASTLEDEN: They shall hold office only during pleasure of the governor in council. The bill uses a vague phrase when it states that it is for the support of prices during the transition from war to peace. I venture to say that if the act is properly administered in the welfare of producer and ultimate consumer alike, instead of in the interests of those people in between, the processors and the distributors, who have such control over these products, the continuation of this type of thing can well be considered. There is the fact that this board as set up will have only three members on it, so that it must be carefully picked. If the personnel of the board has the attitude that we may support the rights and privileges of so-called private enterprise, which in many cases, so far as food for example is concerned, are monopolies, then we can expect mighty little from this act.

A good many of the boards that have existed heretofore have given the people little cause for hope that there would be anything effective, and the powers of the board are so complete and exclusive that it could actually become a very dangerous weapon in the hands of those who have not at heart the final interests of the producing and consuming public. This board has the power to prescribe prices at which it may purchase products. It has the power to purchase those products. It has power to pay to the producers of an agricultural product directly or through such agent as the board may determine. It has power to sell those products or otherwise dispose of them. I hope we shall not have any more of that type of disposal that we had in the hungry days of the thirties, with fruit out in the Okanagan valley, and barley in Saskatchewan worth about six cents a bushel on the Winni-