

*Farm Products Marketing Agencies Bill*

readily. But if the people directly affected by this legislation have no means of registering a protest except through their Member of Parliament, I wonder if this is the wisest type of legislation to have. If we could introduce some means whereby farmers who grow fruit in the Okanagan Valley, or who produce meat in other areas, or chickens or eggs, could register a protest directly to the board, I would be happy to hear about it. Perhaps the hon. member for Okanagan Boundary could enlighten us in this respect. I understand he is going to speak on the bill.

I read the minister's speech this evening and I find that he did not go into great detail on how this legislation might work. I do not see in the legislation any means whereby farmers may have some control over the products which they grow and which presumably will be handled by a suitable marketing agency.

As I said earlier, I favour this type of approach. I feel very strongly that farmers need more bargaining power nationally. I notice that the minister made reference in his speech to the fact that foreign trade is not covered by this legislation. I am not sure of the reason for this. As I recall, he did not say what it was but told us only that the act does not cover it. Again, this raises a question in my mind: Why is there this reservation? Perhaps a government spokesman, again, will tell us why this particular item is omitted. For example, if we raise meat in Canada and there is an import of beef from the United States, why should not a board or agency dealing with domestic beef also deal with imported beef? I would be glad to have an answer to that question. I am raising the question now, not arguing about it.

As I have said, the intent of the legislation is good. What I question is how it will be applied. I think that primarily there is concern among farmers that they will be forced out of farming in increasingly large numbers, and that the need for them is disappearing. I wonder if it is wise policy for the government to reduce the number of farming people in rural areas of Canada. It is true that some of them may not have economic farming units, but when they are forced into cities or urban communities they become a social problem and they increase the unemployment problem.

I ask: What is the cost, financially or socially, of the disruption when a rural family is forced to move into the city? I believe that a cost analysis would prove it to be more efficient to maintain the size and viability of

rural communities, and that the thousands who find rural life attractive should be provided with incentives to permit them to remain on the land. I hope that legislation of the type that we are presently considering will stabilize the price of some agricultural products to such an extent that at least those farmers who have efficient and economic farming units will be enabled to continue farming.

I should like to speak for a moment about some of the changes I have seen taking place in the area which I represent. When I was home during the Christmas recess I visited two large-scale hog producing plants on individual farms. They are somewhat like those one sees on experimental farms. They are efficient units run by up to date, forward-looking farmers. We see quite a few of these, and I am sure there will be more. Farmers nowadays know more about their business. Many of them are highly skilled, efficient operators but they have to be guided by advice from the government.

Not too long ago we were advised to grow more wheat. This, of course, proved to be a mistake. Now we are advised not to grow any wheat. I feel that this, too, is a mistake. I think that if farmers were given some voice and the right to make a decision in the growing, marketing and pricing of their products, there would be less error. Government statisticians and theoreticians are a long way removed from the production area and they do not always understand the problems involved in production.

It is true that we will have surpluses in Canada. I feel that a reasonable surplus in one area is not a bad thing. I recall hearing Jimmy Gardiner at one time talk about having to keep enough butter in the pipeline because if you did not, someone would charge too much money for it. The thing that he did not get around to explaining satisfactorily was that the minute there was five pounds too much, the price went down and nobody made any money. This is something I cannot accept.

We should be prepared in Canada to produce at least some surplus in all fields. I think this would be a national asset, particularly in some areas which produce, for instance, grain of which we should have at all times a fairly large amount in reserve for our own benefit as well as for the benefit of those who depend on us for supplies. I do not think it is a bad thing to have a little extra butter or a little extra of some other produce.

[Mr. Thomson.]