

Appendix JM4: Hansard Extracts

COUNTY WAR AGRICULTURAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEES

HC Deb 06 February 1945 vol 407 cc2025-42 2025

§ 5.31 p.m.

§ Mr. Craven-Ellis (Southampton)

It will be within the recollection of the House that, on 14th December, I raised the question of the relationship between a Mr. Rex Patterson and the Hampshire war agricultural executive committee. The committee complained that Mr. Patterson was not fulfilling the terms of his cropping arrangements. Those relationships went from bad to worse. Perhaps it is as well that I should point out, so that 2026 the House may get a proper perspective on the matter, that Mr. Patterson is the largest farmer in Hampshire. I am told that his acreage is more than 9,000. Mr. Patterson is an efficient farmer. That was admitted by the committee because they graded him A. Although he is in that position he has been charged with not complying with the committee's directions. As time went on the friction between the parties became so acute that the Hampshire branch of the National Farmers' Union took interest in the case and decided to intervene. Their intervention resulted in their appointing a committee to investigate the position and to find what was responsible for the disturbed relations between the parties concerned. The committee went very fully into the whole position and their work resulted in a report being made consisting of more than 5,000 pages. In the report reference was made to the vindictive policy of the Hampshire War Agricultural Executive Committee, a policy which is responsible for dispossessing quite a large number of farmers in Hampshire. I have no doubt that such would have been the fate of Mr. Patterson had he not been a large farmer. One hears, when moving among farmers, that the small farmer is terrified of the dictatorial methods which are adopted not only by the Hampshire Committee but by war agricultural executive committees generally. If you go through the past experience of the officials in the district offices which operate under the main committee, you will find that many of them have had no relation at all with agriculture. Yet they are given vast powers to dominate and control the agricultural industry. I do not propose to go into the details of the report, but I feel that I would be justified in quoting three of the 10 conclusions which are set out in the report of the National Farmers' Union Committee.

§ Mr. Edgar Granville (Eye)

Will the hon. Member make clear exactly what this committee is? Is it a committee set up by the Minister or an independent and impartial committee set up by the National Farmers' Union?

§ Mr. Craven-Ellis

It is a committee set up independently by the National Farmers' Union, the Union having taken a grave view of the Hampshire war agricultural committee, and they decided to have an investigation as an efficient 2027 farmer was concerned. There were four members of the National Farmers' Union on the committee, all highly qualified men. The report of the committee definitely and absolutely vindicated Mr. Patterson. The first of the three conclusions was: That the friction which has occurred and given rise to the present inquiry has been due to the methods and attitude of the W.A.E.C. The second is: That the treatment of Mr. Patterson by the committee and the Ministry was wholly unwarranted and that his conduct, professional methods and personal integrity are such as to be, in our view, exemplary. The third is: That the restrictions exceptionally and unjustifiably imposed on Mr. Patterson should be withdrawn forthwith. That is sufficient evidence to show that the National Farmers' Union took a grave view of the treatment of Mr. Patterson. Since I raised this case in the House in December there have been certain negotiations, and certain understandings have been arrived at. In view of that, I regard the case of Mr. Patterson as now closed, but I am going to use it for the purpose of my further remarks. I have been informed this morning that there are two members of this National Farmers' Union committee who are determined that there shall be a public inquiry into the methods and affairs of the war agricultural committee. It is possible—and I understand it is of frequent occurrence—that war agricultural committees pay little regard to the financial results of certain directions which they are empowered to make to farmers. It was reported only recently that a direction was given to a farmer to grow potatoes and that in the four years he has been subjected to this kind of direction to grow potatoes on land which is unsuitable for potatoes he has lost over £600. There is no question of compensating the man for fulfilling a direction when he is dissatisfied and has notified his committee that the land is unsuitable. He has to submit to carrying the loss himself, which is extremely unfair. I put that forward as one piece of evidence that the control by these committees should be seriously investigated.

§ Sir Ernest Shepperson (Leominster)

The farmer receives £10 per acre for growing potatoes.

2028

§ Mr. Craven-Ellis

Having received the £10 per acre, the farmer to whom I have referred lost over £600 in four years.

There is a much greater issue at stake in this matter. That is the system of control of agriculture. In some respects the war agricultural committees have served a useful purpose and I am informed that the Hampshire War Agricultural Committee so far as

their feeding stuffs department is concerned is carried on very satisfactorily. I submit that the real purpose of the committee should have been to co-operate with farmers rather than to dominate them. The Minister will no doubt tell me that he is satisfied that the committee gives the fullest co-operation. I am informed by a large number of farmers that this co-operation, which is so essential in the industry, has not been given to anything like the extent it should have been given. The committees have these powers and they have abused them with the result that there are over 10,000 farmers who have been dispossessed of their holdings. A few, no doubt, should never have been farmers, but in the main, I submit, it was a great injustice that they should have been dispossessed. Since this case received publicity by my raising it in the House, I have received many letters from farmers setting out the most distressing experiences of the harsh treatment which these committees have imposed upon men who, in the main, are very hard workers. Owing to conditions between the two wars, they have lost most, if not all, their capital, and they found themselves when war broke out in a position in which they required assistance and co-operation. Had that been given nothing like as many as 10,000 farmers would have been dispossessed.

Although I am opposed to the war agricultural committees and their methods of control, I feel it is rather late in the war period to bring about any immediate alteration. I am not going to say that this control should be removed until we have reached the stage when equilibrium has been reached between supply and demand. Whenever that may be, I put forward the suggestion that there should be some method of supervision. The industry has had little or no supervision, and it is essential that it should have. I suggest that the form of supervision should be similar to that which we are accustomed to in relation to property, which has been under supervision since [2029](#) the [Public Health Act](#) of 1875. Since that date more stringent powers have been given and local authorities are in a position to demand that houses should be kept at a reasonable standard having regard to the circumstances of the age.

Why should not that same principle be applied to the proper conduct of agriculture? After all, the man who should have the responsibility is the landlord. I would suggest that there should be county agricultural inspectors, who would be responsible for seeing that the work, as regards ditches, fences, hedges and cropping, is efficiently carried out, and if it is not, the county agricultural inspector should have the power to serve notice upon the landlord, and the landlord, as in the case of a landlord of a house, should be in a position to insist that his tenant should do what work is necessary to see that the land is cultivated and managed in the fullest degree possible, and as efficiently as possible.

It is not possible for me in the short space of time available to say all I should like to say. I sincerely hope that the Minister, having regard to these 10,000 dispossessed farmers, will do something for them. If there is to be an inquiry, which I think is justified, it would

be found that most of these men never should have been dispossessed. I am informed that there have been more than one or two suicides as a result of the harsh treatment which the committees have imposed upon these farmers. Therefore, I feel that a public inquiry is necessary regarding these dispossessed farmers. In particular, so far as the expenses of the war agricultural committee are concerned, we had a White Paper presented to us some months ago showing the colossal expenses of these committees. I am not satisfied that that money is spent judiciously. In view of the large sum of money that is involved, there should be some inquiry into the general methods and conduct of these war agricultural committees throughout the country.

§ 5.48 p.m.

§ Mr. Reakes (Wallasey)

The importance of this question is such that I think it merits consideration on a much wider basis than that of taking an individual case as has been done by the hon. Member for Southampton (Mr. Craven-Ellis). I appreciate all that he has said, and there is a great deal of virtue in his sug- 2030 gestion that there should be a public inquiry. I would like the Minister to consider the wisdom and justice of giving the dispossessed farmer the right of appeal. That is elementary justice. If a bench of magistrates deprives a citizen of his freedom for even a fortnight or a month, that individual has a right of appeal to Quarter Sessions, so that there can be a check on the decision of the bench. If a man in a certain business is to be dispossessed of it under town planning or some other rules of the local town council, that individual has the right of appeal to the Ministry of Health, with the result that an inspector is sent to conduct a local inquiry. Why should not that principle and procedure be followed in dealing with the dispossessed farmer?

These dispossessed farmers—I have heard the number mentioned as being in the realm of 10,000—who have been deprived of their living and in some cases ruined, have had no opportunity of appealing against that decision. I am sure the Minister will not tell the House to-night that in 10,000 cases of dispossessed farmers there have not been some wrong decisions. If so, it must be an almighty organisation. I am open to wager that there must be many dispossessed farmers who have been wrongly dispossessed. I know of some cases in which there is at least a *prima facie* case for the dispossessed farmer to go to an appeal tribunal for the decision to be reviewed and considered, without the local prejudices which surround war agricultural committees. It is a matter of vital importance. It is no use saying that the war is nearly over and that we need not bother about it. I can see the food problem of this country being a serious one for some years after the war. I can see the need for stimulating agriculture and giving encouragement to farmers, instead of discouraging them in this wicked fashion.

I put this suggestion to the Minister, because his Department has been a success. It has had its failures, but of all the Ministries, it is one of the successes, and he has done very

well indeed as Minister of Agriculture. But this is a sore point. In certain journals, "Truth" and others, there have been some candid articles published, showing the injustice of this system in allowing a local committee to condemn a farmer, and not giving a dispossessed farmer the right of [2031](#) appeal against that decision. An organisation has been formed which to me is a healthy sign. I hope to address the executive committee of this association on Wednesday week. I hope it will not be necessary for it to continue, because the Minister can say that he will at least consider setting up some form of appeal tribunal in these cases.

§ 5.52 p.m.

§ *Mr. Loverseed (Eddisbury)*

I intervene because I have raised this matter on other occasions in the past, and it is one on which I feel very strongly. I feel particularly that the method of appointment of these committees is wrong. In the first place, instead of being appointed on a democratic basis they are hand-picked by the Minister. Many who are serving on these war agricultural executive committees are men who have failed to make a success of farming themselves. Far from being practical farmers, they are, indeed, broken-down farmers. There are men serving as chairmen who are perhaps engineers or bankers, or who follow some other occupation quite remote from farming. It is unfortunately a fact that there has been, in many instances, really harsh treatment of farmers, and farmers feel themselves utterly intimidated by these committees. Some of the cases which have been brought to my notice rather remind one of the Gestapo methods used in the countries against which we are fighting to-day.

It would be interesting if the Minister could give figures of the number of suicides among dispossessed farmers. I am certain that if that question were pursued, it would be found that there had been more than an odd case or two. I would reinforce the plea made by my hon. Friend the Member for Wallasey (Mr. Reakes), that appeal tribunals should be set up, so that justice may not only be done but may manifestly appear to be done. I know from the correspondence which has passed between the right hon. Gentleman and myself, that he is quite satisfied in his own mind that complete justice is being done by the existence of the independent land commissioner. I am very sorry that on that point I must disagree, because of some of the cases I have seen. I would put to the Minister a suggestion which was made by the hon. and learned Member for Ilford (Mr. G. Hutchinson), in a recent Adjournment [2032](#) Debate on this subject, that the independent land commissioner, when reviewing these cases, should hold his inquiry in public. That would give some measure of satisfaction. The British farmer is in many ways a curious animal, a very independent person. I feel that better results could have been obtained by leading him, rather than by attempting to drive him. I have been deeply impressed by books I have read about the Tennessee Valley Authority in America. One of the outstanding things in the report of the work of that authority is the way they

have dealt with their farmers. Instead of these autocratic committees, they have set up voluntary associations, which have genuinely helped the farmers to raise the standard of their farming, to improve their technique, and, incidentally, to raise their standard of living.

§ 5.57 p.m.

§ Mr. Godfrey Nicholson (Farnham)

I do not wish to refer, except briefly, to the general and larger issues which have been raised, but I think it is unquestionable that the quality of these committees varies considerably from county to county. My right hon. Friend might look carefully into the possibility of bringing some of the less satisfactory committees up to the standard of the better ones. Even with the less satisfactory committees, it is the case that you hear all the complaints about injustices and so on, while you hear nothing of the great mass of the good work that is done behind the scenes. I would like to say a word about the Hampshire committee, which has been referred to. I farm 800 acres in Hampshire, as a trustee. I have had nothing but great help from the war agricultural executive committee. My only criticism is that they are not quite harsh enough and soon enough in their criticisms. I have many relations in Hampshire, and have lived there almost all my life, and I think I can claim to know the feeling of the Hampshire farmers about their county committee. It is a favourable one, I can say without question; and the members of the committee are unsparing in the time and trouble that they give.

But it is only fair to say that, thanks to my right hon. Friend the Minister, the war agricultural committee often have to tell farmers to farm their land badly. That is inevitable in war-time, when we mortgage the future in order to get extra heavy 2033 yields at the present moment. Hampshire is a county where a great proportion of summer fallow is needed. It is very difficult to get the committee to grant enough summer fallow to any farmer, because they are pushed on by my right hon. Friend to secure the largest possible yield, at the cost of lowering the general efficiency of the land in the future. So far as potatoes are concerned, it is a difficult point. I always feel annoyed when I find I have to grow a certain acreage of potatoes. Only by luck do I get away without making a dead loss. But Hampshire farmers realise that that is part of the contribution they have to make to the war effort, and part of the price they have to pay for the measure of prosperity that my right hon. Friend has guaranteed them. I did not wish to detain the House, but I did wish to say a word in praise of what I believe to be one of the best agricultural executive committees in the country.

§ 6.0 p.m.

§ Mr. Edgar Granville (Eye)

I can think of no better way in which to welcome the right hon. Gentleman the Minister of Agriculture back from the United States—

§ It being Six o'Clock, the Motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

§ Motion made, and Question proposed, "That this House do now adjourn."—[Major A. S. L. Young.]

§ Mr. Granville

—or whichever part of the world he has been visiting, than by holding another Adjournment Debate on the functions of the war agricultural executive committees. We have had a number of these Debates, and the Minister has nearly always given us an inadequate reply, so that I hope that to-night will prove to be the exception. I think we are indebted to the Senior hon. Member for Southampton (Mr. Craven-Ellis) for having raised this question in the larger sense, and, in particular, as it affects the case which we have had referred to by Question and answer in the House—the case of Mr. Patterson versus the Minister of Agriculture. There has been some reference to the fact that there is no real appeal, but the House of Commons is of course the place of final appeal for the farmer who has some dispute on his hands, and in cases where the machinery is inadequate, and it is the democratic [2034](#) method of appeal through the representative of that farmer's constituency here.

In this case, Mr. Patterson is a very large farmer. He farms something like 9,000 or 10,000 acres, and he has made a great success of it. He has used new and effective methods. His war record has proved him to be an efficient farmer, and he is one of the farmers whom the Minister of Agriculture should welcome with open arms, because he has produced a great abundance of food and has enabled the right hon. Gentleman to win the bouquets which he has received from time to time for his good record in wartime food production. Here is Mr. Patterson, who can induce a special inquiry by the National Farmers' Union—I am not sure whether it was a national or a county inquiry—

§ Mr. Craven-Ellis

My hon. Friend has raised the point before. It was the Hampshire National Farmers' Union which held the inquiry, and their report was submitted to the headquarters of the National Farmers' Union, which discussed the matter with the Minister of Agriculture.

§ Mr. Granville

And approved the county recommendation?

§ Mr. Craven-Ellis

N.F.U. headquarters? Yes.

§ Mr. Granville

Here we have an important farmer farming a great acreage, and the results of a county inquiry are confirmed by Bedford Square.

§ The Minister of Agriculture (Mr. R. S. Hudson)

indicated dissent.

§ Mr. Granville

The right hon. Gentleman shakes his head.

§ Mr. Hudson

The hon. Member is quite inaccurate in his statement.

§ Mr. Granville

Well, I shall leave it to the right hon. Gentleman to refute that when he comes to reply. One farmer could get that inquiry by the N.F.U. and its helpful organisation, but what about the hundreds and thousands of smaller men who have been dispossessed up and down the country, and for whom there has been no such machinery which could be put into operation in order to safeguard and protect their livelihood and interests? This is a dispute which has arisen, not hundreds of times, but, as my hon. Friend the Member for Wallasey (Mr. Reakes) said, thousands of times up and down the country.

2035 The whole point of this dispute is that the farmer, large or small, knows what his land will grow better than some individuals sent by the Ministry of Agriculture.

§ Mr. Hudson

No.

§ Mr. Granville

The right hon. Gentleman says "No." I would like to take him to Suffolk, the place which produces the Suffolk punch, and I agree with an hon. Member that the farmer of this country is like the Suffolk punch. You can lead him, but he will not be driven. I would like to take the right hon. Gentleman to the arable county of Suffolk, and let him meet some of the farmers there and discuss these questions of agricultural opinion with him. They would convince him over and over again that the man who has farmed a particular piece of land, just as his father, grandfather and forefathers had done before him, knows very much better than, say, a rival farmer who is one of the right hon. Gentleman's officials exactly what can be produced out of the particular piece of land.

I am not going to ask how much money has been lost by the dictum of the county war agricultural executive committees by the cultivation of uneconomic land because it has been considered essential for maximum food production. The right hon. Gentleman

knew which produce he wanted and the result is that his officials have had to impose conditions on individual farmers. There have been all kinds of suggestions in the House of Commons as to the sort of body which should be set up to enable the farmer to make his appeal when dissatisfied. There is no body. I would ask the right hon. Gentleman again what we have asked the Parliamentary Secretary, How many times has he had a case of this sort submitted to his Department and has reversed the decision of the county war agricultural executive committee? I do not think that there could have been more than two or three occasions on which that has been done—perhaps none at all.

I ask the Minister, What he is going to do about these committees in the future? The right hon. Gentleman has the reputation of being a strong man who does not bend the knee, but he is a little coy on this matter. He has been putting over the House of Commons one excuse or an- [2036](#) other. On one occasion he said he was not in a position because, however much he would like to do so, he had received instructions not to give an indication of Government policy. The right hon. Gentleman has now finished his tour abroad and it is time that he told Parliament and the industry of agriculture his post-war policy, particularly with regard to the function of war agricultural executive committees after he has finished his war food production programme. He knows what the National Farmers' Union have decided about this and that their policy is about to be issued, or has been issued, on a long-term programme for agriculture.

I have heard it said that the National Farmers' Union's long-term policy on agriculture is in favour of a continuation of county war agricultural executive committees, with certain modifications in the controls. If that is the case, is there any other reason why the Minister cannot tell Parliament and the countryside what his policy is to be in the future? He has consulted agricultural workers, landowners and the National Farmers' Union and, in fact, every kind of body. I want him to consult the House of Commons and to make a declaration of policy on behalf of His Majesty's Government; or is it being kept as something to be put into the shop window for the General Election? That is not good enough. The Minister of Agriculture has a good record behind him and I want him to have a good record if he is to continue as Minister of Agriculture in the future. I warn him to-night that there is a growing feeling among farmers and agricultural workers that he is not acting in a completely straightforward way with the industry in this important matter of the declaration of His Majesty's Government's long-term policy. He has given us his four-year plan, or whatever it has been called. He has told us that there are prices up to the harvest of 1947 or 1948, but that in itself is not enough.

Finally, I want to know what is to happen to all these farmers who have been dispossessed. Are they to be given the first opportunity to get back their farms which are held at the moment by the right hon. Gentleman through his committees? Are they to be given the opportunity to take over those farms when we go into peace production? And what will be the financial arrangements? [2037](#) We have told the Minister over and over

again that some of these men were unfairly dispossessed. Some of them had 20 years of unfavourable conditions and depression on their shoulders with mortgages and so on. They ought to be given the opportunity to enjoy the new conditions which the right hon. Gentleman has given to the county committees. He knows the fear which is gripping the hearts of the agricultural economist and agriculturist in this country to-day; it is the fear that he will repeat what happened with the repeal of the [Corn Production Act](#) after the end of the last war. Therefore, the time has come for the Minister to make it quite clear whether these committees will continue after the war as part of the set-up. I ask the Minister therefore, in replying to my hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, who raised this case and the question of these committees generally, to tell us now plainly what is to be their future in the post-war period. But above all let us have the Government's post-war policy now.

§ 6.12 p.m.

§ [The Minister of Agriculture \(Mr. R. S. Hudson\)](#)

It might be tempting to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Eye (Mr. Granville) but I am quite sure it would be out of Order, because his proposal requires legislation, and an Adjournment Debate is not the occasion for such a statement. The hon. Member for Southampton (Mr. Craven-Ellis) raised this question to-night and dealt in particular with the case of Mr. Patterson. I do not propose to go in detail into that case because I hope it has been settled and, as at present advised, I understand that Mr. Patterson has agreed with the Committee on his cropping programme, and I do not want to do or say anything that will make future relations more difficult now that this dispute has been got out of the way.

§ [Mr. Craven-Ellis](#)

May I interrupt—

§ [Mr. Hudson](#)

No, I have very little time. On the general question, I would say this. The hon. Member for Southampton asked that war agricultural committees should co-operate, and not dominate the farmers in their areas. That is exactly what they are doing. They are co-operating, or endeavouring to co-operate, with farmers, and it is only when the farmer refuses to co-operate that the [2038](#) committee are compelled, in the national interest, to take action. The hon. Member for Southampton suggested that there was something inherently wrong in the idea of a committee issuing directions to a large farmer like Mr. Patterson, farming some 9,000 acres and graded as an "A" farmer. What actually happens, however, is that the local war agricultural executive committees have been entrusted by me with the responsibility of seeing that maximum food production is obtained by the individual farmers in the light of all the circumstances.

Experience has shown us that the best way to do that is to discuss at the beginning of the year with the individual farmer how his fields should be cropped. If, as in the overwhelming majority of cases, there is agreement between the farmer and the local district committee of farmers, that programme is sent to the executive committee, and sanctioned as a matter of course. In the case of Hampshire, a formal letter is written to the farmer, agreeing to the programme. But if it is decided that the total area of wheat, for example, to be grown by a farmer is 200 acres, it does not mean, as the hon. Member seems to think, that it is sufficient for that farmer to grow 200 acres of wheat in any fields he likes. What he is required to do is to sow particular fields with wheat, and it may as a coincidence happen that the acreage of those fields adds up to 200 acres. If, on the other hand, after a letter has been issued and agreement has been reached, there are other circumstances which result in the farmer thinking that it would be better to alter the cropping of a certain field, it is always open to him to approach his local committee and, through them, the executive committee, put forward his views, and reach agreement.

The objection we had to what Mr. Patterson was doing was that he was not carrying that out; he was claiming that he was entitled to alter his cropping programme at his own sweet will, and it was only in order to stop that, and to be fair to more than 90 per cent. of the farmers who were loyally carrying out the agreements they had made, that we had to step in. We had to step in and take action because the agreement reached was not being carried out. I quote the Patterson case only to show that we are co-operating with farmers, that we have reached agreement with 95 to 98 per cent. [2039](#) of the farmers and that it is only in the small minority of cases that we have to step in and use the very drastic powers which Parliament conferred upon me and which, in turn, I have delegated to my committees.

The hon. Member for Southampton and the hon. Member for Eye asserted that they would be interested to know what losses had been incurred by farmers as a result of carrying out instructions and following the advice given to them by the war agricultural executive committees. Well, if you are to make an inquiry into the losses suffered by a few farmers as a result of following advice, it is necessary, at the same time, to make inquiries as to profits made by others as a result of carrying out advice. I do not think that when you put the two sides of the balance sheet together you would have much difficulty in deciding whether the advice of committees has been good or bad.

§ Mr. Granville

I was asking the Minister whether he could indicate the losses on farms which were actually being farmed by his representatives.

§ Mr. Hudson

I understood the hon. Member was asking about losses made by individual farmers as a result of carrying out advice. But if he is talking about the financial result of farming by my committees, it is relevant to bear in mind that, ex hypothesi, we started with only the worst land, derelict land, which no farmer could be got to take over. The figures of dispossessions include odd fields in towns owned by building speculators, who left them derelict and made no use of them at all. It must not be thought that every single case of dispossession is that of an active farmer engaged on his own farm.

The hon. Member for Wallasey (Mr. Reakes) suggested that there were numbers of wrong decisions taken. I have always said that Members in this House form a court of appeal. The real safeguard to the farmer, in my view, is twofold. In the first place, he is not condemned unheard. He has a full written statement of the reasons why we take exception to his particular mode of farming. He has an opportunity of appealing, with friends or anyone to help him, before the executive committee. There is then an independent examination by my land commissioner [2040](#) and, finally, there is this honourable House as a final court of appeal. I have made a number of detailed investigations following complaints from individual Members and I have yet to find a case in which, in my honest and sincere judgment, we have made a wrong decision. I have investigated a number of cases over and over again, because the same man has written to successive Members of Parliament.

§ Mr. Loverseed

Is not the investigation made by the same people who dispossessed them?

§ Mr. Hudson

No. I have sent independent investigators when there was any shadow of doubt, and I have yet to come across a case in which, on the facts, the decision taken was wrong.

The hon. Member for Southampton referred repeatedly to the N.F.U. In the Patterson case it was the local branch and not the headquarters of the N.F.U. who raised it. Although the N.F.U. headquarters intervened and asked that we should give it special consideration, I do not think it is accurate to say that N.F.U. headquarters ever told us that they considered the case made by the local branch was well-founded.

§ Mr. Driberg (Maldon)

Will the right hon. Gentleman deal with the point about the possibility of having a simple local inquiry by the commissioner, in public, and, secondly, may I ask on what basis the committees grade farms "A" and "B"? Is it on efficiency of management, or on quantity of output, because the two factors do not always exactly coincide?

§ Mr. Hudson

To a great extent, both. There are two farms with which the hon. Member for Southampton is himself associated, one run by him, and one by a tenant. They both happen to be graded "B" plus. In one place the arable cultivation is good but the milk production poor, and in the other the milk production is good but the arable cultivation poor. Taking either one or the other, they would be "A," but the supplementary side of the farms not being good enough brings both down into "B." Both factors are taken into account.

§ Mr. Driberg

The local inquiry?

§ Mr. Hudson

I do not think that would be a sound idea. Possibly, when we come [2041](#) to consider the post-war set-up the House, or my successor, may decide that on the whole, when supply and demand are balanced, there are advantages. The whole question will have then to be discussed. All I can say at present is that I do not see any advantage in it, and having regard to the details of the cases, the very harrowing details in many cases, and of the reasons why we have to dispossess a man, I do not think the man himself would do other than suffer from a public inquiry. At present the person who is dispossessed has the chance of getting something else, and I am satisfied from the cases I have seen that very often, if the full facts came out at an inquiry, his chances of getting another farm would be very small. In the farmer's own interest, therefore, we had better leave things as they are.

§ Mr. Deputy-Speaker (Mr. Charles Williams)

Mr. Loftus.

§ Mr. Craven-Ellis

I should like to ask the Minister a question.

§ Mr. Deputy-Speaker

I do not think we can have a series of questions after the Minister has sat down and I had called Mr. Loftus.

§ 6.26 p.m.

§ Mr. Loftus (Lowestoft)

While I admit fully the validity and strength of my right [2042](#) hon. Friend's argument about a court of appeal, I think we all have a feeling that, if possible, there should be, in certain cases at any rate, some kind of further appeal. I therefore suggest that there should be some method of appeal if the county war agricultural committee differ from the district agricultural committee. They are two bodies of farmers, and possibly the

men with the local knowledge may differ from the central county committee. I therefore suggest that, if a court of appeal cannot be set up wherever there is a difference of opinion between the district committee and the county committee whether a man should be dispossessed, special inquiries should be made.

§ Mr. Hudson

rose—

§ Mr. Deputy-Speaker

I really do not see how the Minister can make another speech.

§ Mr. Driberg

Would there be any objection to the Parliamentary Secretary replying?

§ Mr. Deputy-Speaker

He is showing no intention of doing so.

§ Adjourned accordingly at Twenty-eight Minutes after Six o'Clock.

Tractors

Volume 472: debated on Thursday 23 March 1950

54.

Mr. Hurd

asked the Minister of Agriculture the numbers of agricultural tractors on farms in the United Kingdom in 1939 and at the present time

Mr. T. Williams

It is estimated that in 1939 there were about 55,000 agricultural tractors in use in the United Kingdom. According to census returns, there were about 245,000 in January, 1948. A further census has just been taken and up-to-date figures should be available in a few weeks. The best estimate that can be given in the meantime is that there are about 300,000 in use at present.

Mr. Hurd

Will the Minister give the House an assurance that his Department has now made up its mind about the number of tractors, because in the Debate on the Address the Parliamentary Secretary gave a very different figure?

Mr. Williams

That was unfortunately due to a clerical error.

Farm Improvement Schemes (Grants)

Volume 563: debated on Wednesday 30 January 1957

Mr. J. E. B. Hill

asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he is yet able to make a statement on the application of the proposed farm improvement schemes to particular types of agricultural buildings, including those whose construction is urgently needed before next harvest.

Mr. Amory

Following the issue of the White Paper on Long Term Assurances for Agriculture (Cmnd. 23), the Government have had further consultations with representatives of farmers and landowners and have also had discussions with the professional bodies concerned with agriculture. It is now proposed, subject to Parliamentary approval of the legislation, to provide grants which will, except where grant is also obtained from other sources, be at a flat rate of 33½ per cent. There are still many details to be worked out; but, subject to the general conditions of eligibility which were set out in the White Paper and which will be incorporated in the necessary legislation, the grants will cover a series of farm improvements which will, in the first instance, be on the following lines:

- (i) erection, alteration, enlargement or reconditioning of permanent farm buildings (other than dwelling-houses), yards, loading banks and stocks. (Internal fittings will be excluded; in such cases as grain dryers which are composed partly of a fixed permanent structure and partly of machinery and fittings, grants will be payable on the structure);
- (ii) making and improvement of farm roads and bridges;
- (iii) execution of works for or in connection with the supply of electricity to farms for agricultural purposes;
- (iv) provision of pens and other fixed equipment for use in connection with the sheltering, gathering, marking, dipping treatment or feeding of sheep and cattle;
- (v) making, restoration, and improvement of permanent fences, walls and gates;
- (vi) provision of cattle-grids, including grids on public roads;
- (vii) provision of means of sewage disposal, other than from dwelling-houses;
- (viii) reclamation of waste land;
- (ix) provision of shelter belts;
- (x) removal of hedges and banks, filling in of ditches, removal of boulders, tree roots and other like obstructions to cultivation;

(xi) claying and marling.

Repairs will rank for grant if they are necessarily associated with improvement work but not otherwise.

2. Horticultural units will be eligible for grant on permanent fixed equipment which is common to agriculture and horticulture, such as stores and yards, but not for specialised horticultural equipment such as glasshouses and cold storage equipment.

3. As stated in the White Paper (Cmnd. 23) grants will be available in respect of all equipped farm units that are economic or could be made so with the improvement proposed. Normally the equipment of new holdings on bare land will be assisted only as part of a scheme of amalgamation Units which do not at present provide a sufficient livelihood will be considered for grant where it is proposed to amalgamate them with other land to form one or more units which will do so. In such cases 33½ per cent. grant will be available towards certain incidental expenses of amalgamation, including legal and surveying charges and compensation for disturbance to out-going tenants.

4. Improvements of the types set out above will be eligible for grant provided

② (a) that they will contribute materially for the period of their life to the efficient working of the farm;

② (b) that they will be capable of giving a reasonable return in profitability for a period of years to an occupier and will result in an increase or prevention of decrease of annual value. Therefore assistance will normally be confined in practice to improvements with a life of not less than 15 years; and the cost and extent of the improvements will be expected, having regard to the character and situation of the holding, not to exceed the provision which a prudent landlord might be expected to make or to be disproportionate to the capacity of the unit to support it;

② (c) that they will be sufficient in scope to enable the fullest advantage to be obtained from the capital outlay;

② (d) that reliance on temporary rather than on permanent buildings would not be more appropriate.

[Toggle showing location of Column 195](#)

5. Grant will be payable to landlords, owner-occupiers, and tenants who must, where this is necessary under the Agricultural Holdings Acts, obtain the approval of their landlord or of the appropriate Minister.

Hedges (Grants)

Volume 101: debated on Friday 18 July 1986

Mr. Steen

asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) when the grant for removal of hedges in order to amalgamate fields was introduced; and when it was discontinued;(2) what level of grant was paid to farmers in each of the last three years to assist them in removing hedges in order to amalgamate fields; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Fenner

[pursuant to her reply, 17 July 1986]: Grants for the removal of hedges to facilitate field amalgamation were introduced in 1957. They were discontinued in 1974 and no grants have been paid for this purpose since 1976. The agriculture improvement scheme, which was introduced on 1 October 1985, now encourages the provision, replacement or improvement of hedges through grants at rates of 60 per cent. in the less-favoured areas and 30 per cent. elsewhere. These high rates of grant reflect our concern for the conservation of the environment.