
PEACE AND WAR FARMING

A SURVEY FROM MICHAELMAS

THE GOVERNMENT POLICY

By G. T. Hutchinson

In view of a considerable flutter caused in agricultural circles by the Prime Minister's speech at Kettering in July farmers may have wondered at Michaelmas, the normal beginning of the agricultural year, whether a case exists for some alteration of their farming plans. Hitherto a forward policy had been indicated. The question of national defence had put agriculture in the news again, and various utterances had come, some from authoritative sources, indicating the contribution which increased agricultural production in this country might make to national security—our "second line of defence." As no limit for such increase had been suggested, it might almost have been said that our farmers were being encouraged to make this country self-supporting in foodstuffs.

Perhaps it was desirable that the Prime Minister should make it clear that this aspiration formed no part of the Government's policy; that, even if it were attainable, it would involve other undesirable results; and that he would not encourage an artificial and probably uneconomic expansion of home production for that purpose: agriculture must develop on normal lines.

LEEWAY TO MAKE UP

Practical farmers are probably agreed that in time of peace the best agricultural policy is one that makes farming pay, and that the best Government is one which can persuade an urban democracy dependent on imported foodstuffs to make this possible. Tried by this test the National Government should stand higher in the estimation of farmers than any Government which has held office within the last 100 years. When it took office in 1931 the outlook for agriculture was black. As a result of Government action since then, through import duties, quotas, subsidies, or the operation of Marketing Acts and other statutes, the producers of most agricultural commodities—wheat, barley, oats, potatoes, sugar beet, hops, beef, and milk—are now secured against the possibility of a heavy loss, and in normal conditions may hope for a reasonable profit. Other commodities—sheep, pigs, and poultry—are being dealt with. It is interesting and encouraging to note that the principle embodied in all the remedial measures associated with Sir John Gilmour, Mr. Walter Elliot, and Mr. Morrison is again advocated in the recently published manifesto of the National Farmers' Union, where it is described as "price insurance."

It is true that progress has not been fast enough to please every one. There was a lot of leeway to make up, and unsuspected difficulties have had to be met: farmers had lost