

*Rural Development*

and there is a place for them up to a point. We also find that in the last 50 years the maritimes have changed from producing an important portion of their flour requirements to a situation today in which virtually all flour requirements are imported from western Canada.

It is true that in Prince Edward Island especially, and also in New Brunswick, there is trade in the opposite direction in food products, chiefly potatoes, which are exported in large quantities to markets in central Canada and the New England states. In the past number of years the provincial governments have also made a great effort to develop frozen food industries, and they are helping the economy to a considerable extent.

What is happening to agriculture in the maritime provinces? Why is this great importation of food necessary? Is it that the potential agricultural production in the maritimes has already been fully exploited? You would imagine, Mr. Speaker, that that is probably the case, but in actual fact it is not the case. In my own province of Prince Edward Island, which depends to such a very great extent on agriculture, the situation has been a very discouraging and disappointing one over the period of the last 30 to 40 years.

I should like to quote briefly from a very excellent publication known as memoire No. 9, produced by the geographical branch of the Department of Mines and Technical Surveys, 1962-63, with reference to land use in Prince Edward Island. This publication points out that between 1911 and 1956 the Island's acreage of improved agricultural land decreased from 769,000 acres to 645,000 acres, or approximately by 16 per cent. In other words, over that period of time 16 per cent of the agricultural land in Prince Edward Island has been abandoned. In addition, the number of farms has decreased between 1941 and 1956 from 12,230 to 9,442.

This is to me, Mr. Speaker, a shocking decrease in the use of the agricultural potential of that small province. Naturally the question we need to ask and to which we should find the answer is: What is the basic root cause of this situation?

A number of factors can be cited. There are of course the economic causes, such as small farms which had served their purpose during the pioneering stage of subsistence living but which were unable to make the transition to a commercial operation which was viable. But I believe there are other

causes. For example, I am concerned with rural blight. I have noticed that when a rural area becomes depressed a cumulative effect sets in and the economy of the area becomes depressed. It becomes more difficult for that area to carry the necessary facilities to maintain a reasonable standard of living, such as provision of good schools and so on. The educational level of the people drops and they become discouraged. The more ambitious of them, or at least the more discontented, emigrate from the area, which becomes depopulated as a result, making it more difficult for the people who remain to carry on supporting community requirements such as schools, churches, roads, telephones, power lines and so on. You have a spreading malaise within the area which, once it starts, is very difficult to cure. There has been a tendency by all governments over the years, I believe, to fail in their attempts to get at the root cause of this problem. There has been a tendency for agricultural departments to follow the doctrine that: To him that hath shall be given; and from him that hath not, even that which he hath shall be taken away. What I mean by that is that the agricultural departments over the years have been concerned chiefly, or to a great extent perhaps, with the better types of farmers—the farmers that tend to go to them for information.

• (9:50 p.m.)

At the lower end of the scale there are the completely discouraged, poorly educated, depressed farmers who have given up hope almost entirely and who have failed. They have become so cynical in their attempts that they have failed to seek advice of a technical nature from agricultural departments which are doing their best to bring about better methods of farming and to bring about all those other things that would lead to a better life for others.

There is a tendency for government services to be provided—I mention services such as rural electrification, and so on—for those areas that have the greatest number of people, where such services can be put in with a minimum of outlay. The result of this is that thinly populated areas which need encouragement and stimulation are the last to be considered, and the last to be served. This has further discouraged the backward agricultural areas, with the result that even in a province such as Prince Edward Island, where agriculture is of such importance, and