

little or no growth (in the Prairie Provinces there were often actual declines in population), reflecting not only the contraction in the farm population but a virtual cessation of growth in dozens of small towns and villages.

Behind the accelerated decline in the farm population to which attention has already been drawn - 7 per cent in the five years 1951 to 1956 as compared with 10 per cent in the preceding ten years - lie some rather diverse developments. The decline was particularly striking in the Atlantic Provinces, where it amounted to 14½ per cent. Since it was accompanied in Newfoundland, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick not only by a substantial decline in the number of farms but by a roughly corresponding contraction in the area of occupied farm land, it probably represented a drop in the subsistence farming that is commoner in this than in other regions of Canada. Progress in mechanization on the reduced number of farms, however, was notable, the number of farm tractors in the Atlantic Provinces increasing by 55 per cent in the five years and the number of motor trucks by 33 per cent.

In the Prairie Provinces, and to a lesser extent in the central provinces, the decline in the farm population reflected a continuation of the long-term trend towards fewer, larger and more highly mechanized farms. In the three western provinces, while the number of farms decreased substantially, the total area of occupied farm land actually increased a little. At the same time, the number of grain combines in the three provinces rose by 48 per cent and the number of farm tractors by 16 per cent. In the central provinces, the decrease in the number of farms and the increase in their average size was a good deal less striking, but mechanization moved rapidly ahead: in 1956 the number of farm tractors in Ontario and Quebec was nearly 40 per cent greater than in 1951.

All across Canada, too, there was a marked increase in the number of farms reporting electric power. Progress in this respect was particularly noticeable in the Prairie Provinces. Nearly twice as many Prairie farms reported electric power in 1956 as at the preceding census date, though in Alberta and Saskatchewan the proportions (52 per cent and 42 per cent respectively) were still much smaller than the 80 to 90 per cent which now have this convenience in Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Quebec, Ontario, Manitoba and British Columbia.

THE YEARS AHEAD

The "Review" then engaged in speculation on how well the extraordinary rate of population growth of the past few years will be maintained. Clearly much will depend on economic conditions. Immigration is usually very sensitive to any slackening in business, and

marriages tend to follow the course of the major indicators of business activity. An economic downturn, particularly if at all prolonged, could reduce immigration drastically and would almost certainly be reflected in a contraction in marriages and in due course in a less buoyant birth rate.

So far, of course, all these various factors in population growth have remained buoyant: the official estimate for June 1, 1957 places the Canadian population at 16.6 million, an increase of no less than 3.2 per cent in the year following the 1956 census date. Preliminary vital statistics for the first half of 1957 indicate that the birth rate is being maintained at its recent high level and that the trend in marriages, which slackened in 1954 and 1955, is strongly upward again, despite the fact, already noted, that the 20 to 29 age group from which the largest number of marriages comes is relatively small. Immigration, which also turned upward again last year after slackening in 1955, this year promises to reach a new high for the postwar period.

In any case, the size of the age groups now marrying and raising young families suggests that there could well be a few years of rather less buoyant population growth, and consequently a period of somewhat less vigorous demand for houses and household equipment.

The uptrend in births that got under way before the end of the thirties will shortly begin to make itself apparent in the numbers of young people coming of working and marrying age.

In 1962, the first contingent from the postwar boom in births will be reaching 15 years of age. High schools will be having to cope with the wave of children that has been inundating elementary schools for the past few years, and the universities will have on their doorsteps the throngs of young students for whom they are already preparing. A few years later these young people will be taking jobs, marrying and founding families.

However things develop in the meantime, the size of this group makes it highly probable as the decade of the sixties unfolds there will be growing pressure on the housing market and an upsurge in demand for all the varied equipment that goes into new houses, not to mention the many kinds of services and the vast array of consumer goods required by growing families. This increased demand for goods and services implies new investment in productive facilities and social capital. Thus, the demands of a rapidly increasing population will be a factor of mounting strength in the decade of the sixties. If world conditions are at all favourable, this could result in a period of expansion and broadening growth in the Canadian economy dwarfing anything this country has yet experienced.