

The Budget—Mr. Perron

favour but the recognition of their rights. He cannot refuse his intervention for a measure which not only is in the interest of the future hotel itself, but constitutes a safeguard for the sacred rights of the French-Canadian people.

Mr. Robert Perron (Dorchester): Mr. Speaker, the economic slowdown in this country over the past fiscal year has been mainly due to the poor wheat crop in the west. Or so, at least, the Minister of Finance's budget speech would have us believe.

I would like to call to the attention of the government the fact that the crop in the province of Quebec has been no better. Because of constant rains throughout the summer our farmers, who have had great difficulty in seeding last fall, have had almost complete failures. I do not think it exaggerated to state that, at least in my county and adjacent counties, the crop has been just about one-fourth of what it generally is and that the grain produced is of inferior quality.

This has possibly not influenced the national gross product in as spectacular a fashion as the poor wheat crop in the west, but it has nevertheless placed the farmers of our rural counties in a difficult position. They are faced at this time with a shortage of good quality seed grain. This short supply means that the seed will cost more, so that farmers will have to spend hundreds of dollars more than before for spring seeding.

The situation is serious and many farmers do not expect to be able to sow their fields, which would be a disaster for themselves and for the economy in general.

Other members of the house have mentioned that situation, in particular the member for Bonaventure (Mr. Arsenault). The member for Bonaventure writes excellent books but sometimes makes bad speeches. He told the house about the situation in the province of Quebec on the agricultural front, but it is to the provincial government that he applied for help. It seems to me, Mr. Speaker, that he would have been wiser to put to good use the marked influence he exerts upon the federal government and ask it to take action to solve that very acute problem.

And he might have put forward numerous precedents. To mention only two cases, when Nova Scotia apple producers were heavily hit and when the western farmers needed help recently, the central government was not reluctant to grant them the help called for in such

[Mr. Girard.]

predicaments. I do not see why, when it is the farmer in the province of Quebec who needs help, the federal government should not be as liberal as it has been elsewhere, in the face of a situation which is exactly the same and which is due to identical causes.

Therefore I ask the government to provide them with some assistance, in co-operation with the different agricultural organizations of our province, either by way of loans—for our farmers do not want handouts—or by way of subsidies.

There is no doubt that the prosperity of our farmers is the very basis of the general prosperity of our country; as a matter of fact, unemployment is directly connected with and due to our agricultural recession. It will come to an end at the same time as the agricultural depression.

If you read the report of last year's operations under the Farm Improvement Loans Act, R.S.C., 1952, chapter 110, you will see that the loans to farmers, and guaranteed by the government, have gone down by \$35 million in 1954. In other words they were reduced from \$98 million in 1953 to \$63 million in 1954, a difference of \$35 million. These figures are clear enough, and show how the farmer is in need of money, either to buy agricultural implements, improve livestock, or to carry out certain building and improvement projects on the farm.

The effect of that situation is to paralyse the general economy of this country, and this is why the government should not hesitate to help eastern farmers who had a poor crop last year, in order to solve the economic problems of this country and prevent them from getting worse.

To go on with my suggestion, Mr. Speaker, I wonder if the government should not amend the Farm Improvement Loans Act so that it might be possible to ensure the loans of money needed by the farmers in the spring for their seed purchases.

The loans made to date, under this legislation passed in 1945, amount to \$513 million, and the loans which the government is called upon to reimburse, according to its guarantee, amount to only \$149,814, which is a very insignificant figure, that is, $\frac{1}{30}$ of 1 per cent. This means that loans to farmers are very secure investments. They are probably the best the government could make.

At all events, if the government decided to amend the law in this way, I would be pleased to vote in favour of the amendment.