

Mr. MACKENZIE: What year was that?

Mr. MILLER: The mill was opened officially on December 21, 1945, and it has a capacity to handle 1,000 acres of flax. I know the mill cost over \$100,000, and that it has in it the best possible equipment. There is also available equipment for harvesting flax. I am not sure of the figure, but I believe that probably the entire investment by the Dominion of Canada in that plant would be in the neighbourhood of \$250,000 or \$300,000.

I understand that it employs twelve or fifteen persons, including scientists who are conducting scientific experiments. As I said before, we had great hopes for that mill. We had been led to believe—and not necessarily by officials of the department—that it would be used for experiments, not altogether in connection with oil flax, but mainly in respect of fibre flax. We also calculated that when it proved that flax could be profitably raised and that it was a good type of flax, perhaps the mill would be turned over by the government to private enterprise and expanded, or perhaps the government would expand it themselves. I do not think the experimental stage has yet passed, but in any event the people of the area are slightly worried that the operations of the plant are to be curtailed. That would be a tragedy, not only to us who have, as I said, great hopes for it, but a tragedy to the whole west, because I believe it has been proved that flax to maintain a mill like this can be grown in western Canada.

Mr. GARDINER: May I ask where the suggestion has come from that the activities were to be curtailed?

Mr. MILLER: I am leading up to that. The suggestion has come from the farmers, because ordinarily arrangements have been made to seed, as I say, from 80 to 200 acres of flax in that area. This year no arrangements are being made with the farmers to seed any flax. At the moment fifty-six or sixty stacks of fibre flax—two I think are linseed flax—are piled up in the yard near the plant. But that flax will all be run through by August or September, and all that is in sight is ten acres of flax which is being grown on the provincial farm in the Portage la Prairie area. The board of trade of the city of Portage la Prairie are concerned because we do not want that plant to be curtailed. What we want to know—and perhaps the Minister of Agriculture will tell us that when he speaks—is what is to be the future of this mill. I should like to know if the experimental period has been completed. Is

[Mr. Miller.]

the mill to be expanded by the government? Is it to be sold to private enterprise for the purpose of expansion? Do the officials of the minister's department believe that good fibre flax can be grown in that area and in western Canada? May I just say that I am not complaining or criticizing in any shape or form the officials of the minister's department. On the contrary, I have always had the greatest courtesy and cooperation from Doctor Archibald, from the chief of the fibre division and also from the local manager of the plant at Portage la Prairie. But I suggest that the plant should not be curtailed in any way. I am hoping that it will not, because it is an industry that can do much for the west in proving that this type of flax can be grown in the west.

As I said, the whole district is proud of the mill. We are hopeful of its future and we are confident that something good for the west will come out of it. Our hope is that there will be no curtailment of its activities; that it will be expanded rather than curtailed.

I should like to say a few words about the Prairie Farm Assistance Act, and they will be few because quite frankly I know not a great deal about it. I wish to make a few remarks, because I believe that the Minister of Agriculture is still considering whether he will bring in certain changes or a new act at this session. The farmers in our community, which happens to be a reasonably good one, feel that not a great deal of benefit is derived by the farmers of Manitoba from this act. They are not so unselfish as to feel, though, that they would particularly object to a continuation of the one per cent deduction from the sale price of their grains; but they believe that the adjustments of claims should be on an individual basis rather than on the block system as followed now. They would also like to have some provision put in the act for the withdrawal of the farmers of any province who would desire to withdraw from the scheme. I do not know how it could be worked out, except that I imagine it would have to be done with the permission or at the request of the provincial legislature. But I should like to have some consideration given to a provision for the withdrawal of farmers in Manitoba from the scheme if they desire to do so. I am inclined to think that if they could withdraw they would do so; certainly that is true of the most of the area which I represent, unless the act is changed to provide for individual consideration of claims rather than on the present system of the block scheme.