

Supply—Agriculture

Mr. Martin (Essex East): Mr. Chairman, I wonder if the minister would give me permission to leave the house. I have a luncheon appointment with his colleague the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Harkness: As the hon. member knows, he is at perfect liberty at all times as far as I am concerned.

Mr. Hodgson: The hon. member can stay out as far as you are concerned, is that it?

Mr. Harkness: I wish to deal now with the remarks made by the hon. member for Assiniboia.

Mr. Argue: Oh, good.

Mr. Harkness: The hon. member for Assiniboia complained about the fact that I did not comment on vertical integration and a considerable number of other things the details of which I have forgotten at the moment.

An hon. Member: So has he.

Mr. Harkness: As someone comments, possibly he has too. As it was, I spoke for something over an hour. It is impossible in one speech to deal with all matters concerning agriculture. It would be possible to devote a half hour to a discussion of vertical integration alone. When introducing one's estimates it is not usual to delay them by speaking for three or four hours in connection with the large number of subjects that could come up in a department such as this. For that reason I believe complaints of this nature are poorly founded.

Examination of the hon. member's speech indicates that it was chiefly characterized by the fact that he made a great deal of noise and had very little sound material at hand. That is typical of a considerable number of the speeches made by the hon. member for Assiniboia, I am afraid.

Mr. Howard: If that is so, he is not the only one.

Mr. Harkness: The hon. gentleman complained, as did the hon. member for Essex East, that this government did not fulfil its election program for agriculture. I believe we have done so, and the results of the actions taken by this government are reflected in the increased returns which farmers received in 1958 through improvement in their net income position as well as their gross income position.

Mr. Chairman, may I call it one o'clock?

At one o'clock the committee took recess.

[Mr. Harkness.]

AFTER RECESS

The committee resumed at 2.30 p.m.

Mr. Harkness: Mr. Chairman, when the committee rose at one o'clock I had been making some comments on the speech made by the hon. member for Assiniboia about a month ago, I think, when those estimates first came up for discussion. I must say I do not like to make any invidious comparisons but I found the maiden speech of the hon. member for Essex East on agriculture much more interesting. I am glad to see that the hon. member for Essex East is back in his seat and we shall expect even better things from him now that he has got his maiden speech on this subject out of the way.

The hon. member for Assiniboia as well as the hon. member for Essex East and several other members have attempted to paint a picture that agriculture in Canada is in a much worse situation than it has ever been, and things along that line. The numerous statistics which I gave in introducing those estimates on March 6, and what I have already said today, I think prove conclusively that these statements are completely inaccurate and that actually in 1958 agriculture had a reasonably good year, certainly a much better year than it had for at least four of five years previously.

Several members who have spoken here, in addition to the two hon. members I have just mentioned, have said something about the delegation of western farmers which came down here, and have attempted to indicate that this delegation established the fact that the western farmers were all in absolutely desperate circumstances, the grain growers particularly. There are several of those people at least who have written in who are not in those circumstances. Just as an example of that I have a letter written by a man in Govan, Saskatchewan. He writes as follows:

I have enclosed a copy of my net worth statements for 1955 and 1958—

Mr. Martin (Essex East): What is his name and address?

Mr. Harkness: His name is Sid Maber. I gave his address as Govan. The letter reads:

I have enclosed a copy of my net worth statements for 1955 and 1958 which I hope may be of some use in pricking the big balloon for deficiency payments. I believe if the minister demanded such a statement from all those farmers visiting him next week, that there would be considerable squirming.

From this statement you will see that I am a farmer, farming one section of average land, have no other enterprise but grain growing so