

Supply—Citizenship and Immigration

the same time the government should approach the British authorities to see if some system cannot be worked out whereby their government will permit emigrants from that country to bring more money to Canada.

I think Canada is also going to miss the boat if we do not bring in more people from Germany. I had hoped that when Chancellor Adenauer was here last week discussions would have been held as the result of which a good many more German immigrants would have been permitted to come to Canada. I say again that I do not favour unregulated immigration; it is only sensible that it should be planned. But I suggest that we should plan for an objective of 300,000 this year and not 160,000 as in 1952.

Mr. Dinsdale: Mr. Chairman, I think it is significant that during the present session we have had an excellent discussion on external affairs and that today we find many members on all sides of the house taking an interest in matters pertaining to immigration. I feel that these two subjects are closely related. The problem of population is quite intimately connected with some of the difficulties that are facing us in the field of external affairs at the present time. I do not want to hold up the committee unduly, but I think it is rather important that a more or less extended discussion should take place at this time so that we may have a chance to direct the thinking of the public throughout Canada to this very important subject, and also because there have been very limited opportunities on other occasions to deal with matters pertaining to immigration.

This is the first time since I became a member of the house that we have had an extended discussion on immigration. As one who comes from a western constituency, I am most interested in the problems of immigration because we belong to that part of Canada which is sometimes described as "the half-empty half-continent". As I listened to the previous speaker, the hon. member for Moose Jaw, it seemed to me that he also was expressing a viewpoint that might be regarded as peculiar to the west. There is an old poem that describes the spirit of the west and contains a line something like this: "Out where the world is in the making, that's where the west begins". As we look at our lack of human resources on the prairies it is evident that that statement is definitely true because in our huge geographic areas we have tremendous spaces with very limited population. The province of Manitoba, for example, has only 800,000 citizens, a very small group indeed.

As the discussion has proceeded, many of the points that I had in mind have been mentioned so that accordingly my remarks

[Mr. Thatcher.]

will be abbreviated. I agree that from the western viewpoint many of our problems would be overcome if we could solve the difficulty of depopulation. As the hon. member for Moose Jaw mentioned, we have agricultural problems that are with us continually, mainly those relating to the marketing of our products including our grain. A population increase would provide a domestic market which would alleviate that difficulty to a considerable extent. The same applies to the perennial railway problem and to all the other matters that have been mentioned by the previous speakers.

I have tried in my reading and my investigation of the subject since I came to Ottawa to discover the policy of the government in specific terms regarding immigration. The closest one can come to it is the rather vague statement made last July by the minister, which has already been quoted in the house several times today, that immigration is to take place not exceeding the absorptive capacity of the country and without altering the fundamental character of our people. Also there is to be immigration of such persons as are likely to contribute to our national life.

That statement was followed by a radio statement by the chief of the information service of the Department of Citizenship and Immigration, Mr. E. B. Reid. He said that one important factor in Canadian immigration is its flexibility; so that in addition to the absorptive capacity and the policy which attempts to maintain what is described as the fundamental character of our nation we also have now this further principle of flexibility.

However, along with other hon. members of this chamber I have the feeling that each one of these categories is much too vague to provide the specific information that we need to understand the problem of immigration. Several members have queried "absorptive capacity." It is vague; it is not a fixed quantity, and not a fixed entity. The truth of my statement is indicated by the further principle laid down by the chief of the information service to the effect that immigration must be flexible. I think it would be helpful, as we proceed in our discussion of the departmental estimates, if we could come to more realistic grips with the program and the policy of immigration.

In the few minutes at my disposal I wish to deal with some of the principles of immigration as I understand them. During the past year we have seen a decline in the inflow of new citizens from 194,000 to 164,000 which is something like 30,000; but at the same time we have seen a percentage increase in the number of new citizens coming from the United Kingdom.