

well in the western part of Canada. It is not so long ago that some of these gentlemen were using the phrase which has become one of the popular phrases used by pundits, "western alienation".

Now we have a budget designed as an election budget because everybody thought we were on the eve of an election. No doubt there would have been an election had the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) not had information from western Canada and other parts of Canada, particularly the province of British Columbia, that was somewhat negative in terms of the government's prospects. So today—and I suppose we will hear this theme during the rest of the budget debate although it is no longer pertinent in terms of an election budget—we will have paeans of praise in respect of how good things are in western Canada at this time and how much better they will be once the budget which is being debated is implemented.

I suggest that if this is the attitude of these spokesmen on the government side from the west, then there is complete lack of understanding, complete insensitivity and even lack of concern on their part for our continuing problems. Obviously, a budget of this kind will do nothing to overcome the fundamental disparities between western Canada and the central part of Canada in particular.

The Minister of Supply and Services (Mr. Richardson) is in the House this afternoon. He has been one of the most eloquent spokesmen in the past in pointing out that there is a fundamental problem of neglect by the national government. Last February in the city of Brandon, which I represent in this parliament, a meeting took place at the agricultural study centre. It was a small meeting, attended by some 60 leaders in the agricultural community, largely from Manitoba, who went there to discuss the special problems of western agriculture.

As I say, it was not really a representative gathering, with only 60 persons in attendance, but apparently it was from that conference that the Minister of Supply and Services came forward with the thesis of the western fact as a separate entity and separate problem which requires the special attention of the government. There is not one provision in this budget which comes to grips with the problems which were discussed on that occasion. I trust that the Minister of Supply and Services will be making a speech during the course of the budget debate in which he will elucidate some of the conclusions reached at that very important conference. I was not privileged to be present. It was rather an exclusive conference, apparently. I had to obtain all my information second-hand.

Mr. Richardson: I will be glad to send you the notes.

Mr. Dinsdale: The minister has indicated he will send me the notes. I believe it would be much more appropriate if he would make a speech during the course of this budget debate as a spokesman for the province of Manitoba. We have had two spokesmen from the cabinet who represent the province of Alberta, the Minister of Agriculture and this afternoon the Minister of State who has some responsibility for fiscal matters. However, we have not heard from the province of Manitoba in this regard.

I trust that the Minister of Supply and Services, when he makes his statement on these important matters, will do a much better job than the Minister of Agriculture

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whose speech was an apologia for the government's inadequacies in respect of agricultural policies. For example, he compared the total income of farmers in 1971 with 1970, which was the worst year western agriculture experienced. The contribution of the Minister of Agriculture and his counterpart from the province of Saskatchewan, the Minister responsible for the Wheat Board (Mr. Lang), has been to support the government's policies. I cannot understand how a westerner could possibly initiate these policies, but they have had to be the sponsors and spokesmen for policies which have accelerated the movement of farmers off the land.

Statistics have been placed on the record already, but I would quote briefly one or two examples. In 1966 there were 39,747 farmers in the province of Manitoba. In 1971, only five years later, after three or four years of the present Liberal administration, there were 34,981 farmers. This is a decrease of some 5,000 farmers.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Boulanger): Order. The hon. member for Winnipeg South Centre (Mr. Osler) wishes to ask a question.

Mr. Osler: Mr. Speaker, would the hon. member permit a question?

Mr. Dinsdale: I will accept a question.

Mr. Osler: I do not have the statistics with me, but I wonder whether the hon. member can give us the statistics in respect of the decrease in farms in the prairie provinces over, say, the last 20 years in order to give us a comparative setting.

• (1700)

Mr. Dinsdale: I do not have that answer, and I am sure the hon. member can do the research himself. I have the figures put out by the Dominion Bureau of Statistics on Monday, May 1, 1972. They deal with the five-year period to which I have referred.

Mr. Osler: The only point of the question was to see whether the hon. member was trying to establish that there had been an increased depletion of farms under the present government that was extraordinary in historical terms, or whether this was a progressive process.

Mr. Dinsdale: I can understand why the hon. member for Winnipeg South Centre has a slightly guilty conscience in this regard.

Mr. Osler: I have a curious mind, that is all.

Mr. Dinsdale: In the speech which he just completed, he pointed out that all was well in the west. All is not well in the west, and the figures I am quoting apply to the period 1966 to 1971. The same figures apply to Saskatchewan. There is a decrease from some 85,000 to 76,000. I think it is doing a disservice to the people they represent when members of parliament who now find themselves in the cabinet, where they should have some influence on these matters, instead of acting as strong spokesmen for the west act as apologists. If they do it in public, what must they do in private, in the secrecy of the Privy Council? They must be completely silent.