

Right Hon. Mr. MEIGHEN: I am not encouraging long speeches, though. I know the necessities of the hour.

The Hon. the SPEAKER: May I suggest that the Senate should be careful not to set a precedent which it may not desire to follow in future? I think the motion should be moved and the debate opened by the honourable member in whose name the Order stands. It does not seem reasonable to proceed otherwise, because, if we did, the debate might be opened by an honourable member opposed to the motion. However, if it is the wish of the Senate, the honourable member from King's (Hon. Mr. Hughes) may proceed.

Right Hon. Mr. MEIGHEN: It is not a motion, Mr. Speaker; it is just an inquiry calling the attention of the Senate to certain matters. I do not think any senator is debarred from speaking on an inquiry on the Order Paper just because the honourable gentleman in whose name it appears is not present, or even because, though present, he declines to proceed. He cannot prevent it from being discussed merely by being absent or by not going on.

Hon. Mr. HUGHES: Honourable senators, I have put my remarks in writing so that I may make them as brief and coherent as possible.

Sometimes the performance of duty is neither pleasant nor agreeable. Nevertheless duty is or should be of paramount importance. I think I am justified in saying that party politics have but a small part, if any, in the work of this House; and this is as it should be. In order that my attitude towards the Farmers' Creditors Arrangement Act may not be misunderstood or misrepresented, I shall begin by saying that I supported the Act, and helped to put it on the Statute Book of the country. I think it was a well-conceived piece of legislation, which, if properly administered, would do much good. In this respect I am entirely in accord with the resolution passed by the farmers of Prince Edward Island at their annual meeting in Charlottetown last winter. The resolution reads as follows:

Be it therefore resolved that we, the Central Farmers' Institute of Prince Edward Island here assembled, believing that this Act, properly administered, is of great benefit to many of our farmers, would respectfully ask that this Act be continued and would suggest that official receivers under this Act receive a stated salary rather than be paid on a commission basis.

It is my belief that had the farmers who passed this resolution been aware of the manner in which the Act was being administered,

they would have condemned that administration without reserve. The farmers of Prince Edward Island, as a class, are not racketeers and do not believe in racketeering.

I have said that the Act was a well-conceived piece of legislation. But any legislation can be spoiled by maladministration. If I understand the Act aright it was intended to help the honest, industrious man who through no fault of his own could not meet his obligations in full as they matured, by giving such man time, or by reducing his obligations, or by doing both; but in no case was it to be an Act to encourage dishonesty on the part of anybody. And surely it was never intended to be a gold mine for the administrators. It was felt that it would be in the public interest to encourage men who were trying to make good on the land to remain on it rather than to leave it, and that this would perhaps apply more to Western Canada than to Central and Eastern Canada. It was also felt that wherever possible the administrators of the Act would bring debtors and creditors together and effect amicable arrangements. Wherever this was found to be impossible or impracticable, and where the creditors, or some of them, were found to be harsh or unreasonable, it was felt that the commissioners under the Act could themselves make a finding which to them seemed fair and reasonable, and which would be as binding as a court judgment on all parties concerned. This was, and is, in a rough way, my interpretation of the Act. If I am wrong I shall be glad to be corrected.

Now the question arises: Had the administrators of the Act on Prince Edward Island, particularly during the last twelve months, any conception of its provisions, or any conception of the mind of Parliament in passing it, or any conception of justice and common sense? I think not. I shall now relate some of the findings made by the board of commissioners, commonly called the Board of Review, which came under my own observation, and shall relate some of the almost incredible things I have heard, but which I believe to be true, to confirm what I have stated.

In the summer of 1935, Peter D. Peters, of Rollo Bay, made application to the Farm Loan Board for a loan. His application was turned down. No reason was given, so far as I know. I knew a mistake had been made, and I so informed Mr. J. D. MacLean, the commissioner in Ottawa. He admitted they were not mistake proof, and said he would have another appraisal made in the summer of 1936 by one of his best men. This was done and Mr. Peters was offered a loan of