

Speech at the opening of the Fifth Session of the Twenty-Second Parliament.

Hon. Henri C. Bois moved:

That the following Address be presented to His Excellency the Governor General of Canada:

To His Excellency the Right Honourable Vincent Massey, Member of the Order of the Companions of Honour, Governor General and Commander-in-Chief of Canada. May it please Your Excellency:

We, Her Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Senate of Canada, in Parliament assembled, beg leave to offer our humble thanks to Your Excellency for the gracious Speech which Your Excellency has addressed to both houses of Parliament.

He said: Honourable senators, first of all I wish to thank you for your hearty welcome and spontaneous display of friendship shown to me when I first came into this chamber. I shall address the house in French, for honourable senators will easily realize that I feel much more at home when speaking in my mother tongue.

(Translation):

Honourable senators, the speech from the throne contains the following paragraph:

It is proposed to recommend in the Senate the establishment of a committee to consider what should be done to make better use of land for agriculture and thus to contribute more effectively to the improvement of agricultural production and the incomes of those engaged in it.

The governments have always taken an interest in Canadian agriculture, but it is the first time that such a definite proposal is made to consider the agricultural future of Eastern Canada.

Here and there in Canada, and particularly in the East, there are districts where the land, which was not very fertile initially or which has become exhausted through agricultural abuses, cannot give a reasonable income to its owners. This is nothing new. There have always been lands which, after having been cleared, were found incapable of producing a satisfactory income. During the war and post-war period, they were rather profitable but when came the time for making adjustments, operating costs were often greater than the income produced. The explanation is evident when one considers what has taken place between 1946 and 1951 especially, and again between 1951 and 1956.

After the war, agricultural production in the world was 5 per cent below its pre-war position, although the world's population had increased by about 10 per cent. Europe, North Africa and Soviet Russia's agricultural production had dropped from a third to a quarter, but North America's had increased by one third. During the six to eight years which followed the return of peace, the demand for foodstuffs was therefore very heavy.

The financial help given by the Allies, and by the United States in particular, allowed devastated countries to purchase essential food. So that Canada's agricultural exports were very high. About 30 per cent of the grain produced in our country and 13 per cent of our total agricultural production was sold overseas.

But from 1950-51 on, the rehabilitation of farming in the devastated countries allowed them to become self-sufficient and by 1950 their pre-war level was reached, while four years later it was exceeded by 10 per cent.

And every year since 1951 our exports first became stabilized and then began to fall. Agricultural prices also suffered. Thus, while in 1946-47 our cheese exports amounted to 59 per cent of production, in 1954-55 they were only 9 per cent. Evaporated milk dropped from 12 per cent in 1946-47 to 2 per cent in 1954-55; beef, from 9 per cent to 5 per cent over the same period; pork, from 28 per cent to 8 per cent; eggs from 19 per cent to 2 per cent. On the whole, grain excluded, our exports dropped from 13 to 5 per cent in 1954-55, as compared with 1946-47. Grain followed an inverse trend, exports having increased from 29 per cent in 1946-47 to 38 per cent in 1955-56, but in the case of our other important products, exports fell.

Domestic demand, notwithstanding the population's natural increase and its increase through immigration, could not absorb our increasing agricultural production. Farmers, attracted by the 1946-51 level of prices endeavoured to increase production but as in the case of plants and animals agricultural production follows a biological cycle, their attempts to increase production for the most part bore their fruit at a time when our markets' absorbing capacity was decreasing. And the farmers whose farms were expensive to operate were drawn towards industrial or other employment which offered them better incomes because after the war, industry, after hesitating for a while, also launched a large development program. So much so that from June, 1951 to June, 1956, the number of people employed in agriculture fell from 997,000 to 804,000, a reduction of 19 per cent; the number of farms dropped from 612,000 to 544,000 and the number of farmers' sons and daughters working on the farm decreased from 273,000 to 167,000, or by 39 per cent.

Because of these various reductions in farm labour, the production of those who remained on the farm increased over the 1951-56 five-year period by about 30 per cent. It would therefore seem that from the