

interest in the matter and had an interview with him, and I know that he engaged Doctor Speakman, who is head of the provincial national research bureau in Toronto, a very able chemical man—

Mr. GARDINER: He made this report.

Mr. SLAGHT: —and I had conferences with him before the Sarnia plant was actually set up. He went to Washington and conferred at some length with the authorities there on the subject of alcohol and the use of wheat as against the use of petroleum. There was a considerable difference of opinion among the experts in the United States, a good deal of controversy for some time, but I can assure hon. members that Canada investigated the subject thoroughly before the Sarnia plant was decided upon.

Mr. WRIGHT: I quite agree with the hon. member that the government did make a thorough investigation before establishing the plant, but there have been developments since that time. What most members here desire to see is some further investigation so that progress may be made in the development of alcohol from agricultural products, to show whether more can be done in production from that source than from petroleum. We should like to see the government continue experiments to ascertain whether alcohol cannot be made from agricultural products to better advantage than in 1941. I feel sure it can. All the experiments carried on at the present time tend to show that, and it is the desire of most members to have the government carry on these experiments, even though they have committed themselves to the present programme. They have no alternative to that programme since they committed themselves to it, but that is no reason for dropping present experiments.

Mr. GARDINER: There is no intention of dropping any present experiment.

Mr. EDWARDS: It is with some hesitation that I rise to speak on this matter, because I appreciate that in time of war it is not the popular thing to try to divert public thinking from the immediate necessities of war and the problems which they have created. But, having listened in at some of the conferences of the Empire Parliamentary Association and tried to look into the future, it seems to me that, in view of the adjustments which are being made by other countries, allied and anti-ally, western Canadian agriculture is likely to be faced with a serious problem so far as markets are concerned for what are now the natural products of the prairies.

[Mr. Slaght.]

It is not unknown that since the war began the British isles have increased their agricultural production from thirty-five per cent of their national needs to, now, seventy per cent of their national needs. What effect is that going to have on the potential post-war market for the great bulk of, shall we say, western Canada's agricultural production? Is it not a moot question whether Canada can hold the favourable position she now has so far as the British market is concerned? And if peradventure the European countries which during the war have increased their agricultural production should be inclined to continue to do so, what then? They have done this through force of necessity, taking advantage of scientific research and mass production methods; and I am greatly exercised and concerned as to what we in Canada—I am not selfish in this respect, because what applies to western Canada applies also to eastern Canada—are to do with our surplus agricultural products if we continue to produce wheat and as we have done during the war. It may be that we shall have to change, if not our methods, the products of our farms in the west. The war has taught the people of Alberta, at any rate, how to raise hogs advantageously and satisfactorily, and how to produce milk and cheese and butter in quantities such as were never before contemplated. If we are to maintain the agricultural population that we now have in western Canada, we must, I believe, do one of two things: either produce a finer quality of what we are now producing, and more economically than it is now produced, or discover other ways and means of using these products, or other products which can be grown on the soil and in the climate of western Canada.

The first words I uttered in this house come back to me. They were said on the minister's estimates. I put it to myself at that time, and I put it to the committee: what would a business man do under similar circumstances? If he had a surplus production problem in respect of his plant, he would do one of two things. Either he would call in merchandizing specialists to show him ways and means of creating a consumer demand for what he was producing, and thereby enable him to get rid of his surplus, or he would go out and get the best scientific brains and ability that money could buy in order to show him how he could economically change his factory facilities to the production of some other commodity which he could produce economically and which would find a market. That is the history of every successful industrial institution on the north American continent.