

*Agricultural Conditions*

The Prime Minister also referred to the fact, if it be a fact—I presume it is; I shall not dispute it—that large numbers of farmers still have money in the bank. It would surely be a deplorable condition if after all these years there were no farmers with some money in the bank; but let me say that those reserves are being very rapidly depleted. Certainly nothing has been added to the bank accounts of the farmers during the last year or two. So the fact that there are still some of them with money in the bank means nothing at all. Even the farmers who do have a small current account in a bank are not necessarily solvent. It is the practice of men who wish to do business in a business-like way to carry on their business through a bank. But money in a bank by no means proves that agriculture is solvent.

Does the Prime Minister see no significance in certain other facts? Does he see no significance in the fact that the banks have ceased to lend money to farmers? I know that that statement will be disputed, as it has been disputed by the banks; but is absolutely true that the banks will not lend money to farmers on the prospects of next year's crop. I went into a bank, not in my own town but in a neighboring town, and as I had some former acquaintance with the bank manager I had a half hour's conversation with him. I said to him, "I am not wanting to borrow any money, but I want to know if you are lending money to farmers." "Well," he said, "it depends upon circumstances. If a farmer can show good security or that he will be able to repay the loan within a little time, we will consider a loan; but if it is on the prospect of next year's crop, no." That, Mr. Speaker, is the condition which I believe is general throughout Canada. So we need not take very seriously the statements of bank managers that they are lending money to farmers. They may say so, but it is with the mental reservation that they will lend only what the farmer is entitled to. It is quite possible that neither the Prime Minister himself—nor you, Mr. Speaker, nor any of us would lend money to a man who had no prospects of repaying it. That may be good business, I am not saying that it is not; but the fact remains as it is—the banks are not lending money to farmers, and it goes to prove the statement that agriculture is practically insolvent.

Does the Prime Minister also see no significance in the fact that a limited moratorium is now in existence in each of the three prairie provinces? Surely there is some significance in that fact. Does he see no

[Mr. Brown.]

significance in the fact that the Manitoba Debts Adjustment Act came into force only a few days ago? All these things indicate that the conditions are not as the Prime Minister described them to be. Conditions are infinitely more serious than the Prime Minister seems to think they are. Do not these facts which I have cited prove that agriculture is practically insolvent?

It is, I believe, absolutely true that the present depression has wiped out all the equity that many farmers had in their homes. It is no small thing, Mr. Speaker, for a farmer to lose the equity in his home. Remember that a farm is not merely a place of business. It is far more than that. It is the farmer's home around which many sentiments and associations have gathered for, it may be, fifty years or more, and when a farmer through force of circumstances loses the equity in his home that means infinitely more to him than it does for a business man to have to change his place of business or even to have to move from one house in the city to another. Those are the conditions that confront the farmer in this country today, and they are conditions that cannot be minimized.

Perhaps it may not be amiss to refer to the opinions of others who are in touch with the actual conditions. The press of the west has certainly taken notice of what the Prime Minister said. I am going to quote a few extracts:

W. J. Ward of Dauphin, president of the United Farmers of Manitoba, Wednesday, spoke briefly of the statement made in the House of Commons Tuesday by Premier Bennett to the effect that the prairie provinces were not suffering undue hard times.

Mr. BENNETT: Mr. Bennett did not say that at all. That is the other side of it.

Mr. BROWN: The quotation may not be strictly accurate.

Some hon. MEMBERS: No.

Mr. BROWN: That is immaterial for the Prime Minister certainly gave the impression to this house and to the country that in his judgment agriculture was not passing through very serious times.

Mr. BENNETT: Oh, no.

Mr. BROWN: Perhaps we do not understand the English language. Perhaps we do not interpret hon. gentlemen opposite correctly, but certainly that was the impression given to the house and the country.

Mr. MATTHEWS: By whom?