

*The Address—Mr. Zaplitny*

certainly it can be seen that Manitoba is not getting a fair break under this act as it now stands when, over that period of time, we have received only approximately 25 per cent of our own money back—and none from the federal treasury at all—yet when we have a situation such as this, which is a real emergency, the act is practically of no value to us at all.

It is my opinion that the act needs amending, particularly as it applies to Manitoba, to such an extent as to make it applicable to a smaller unit for the purposes of qualification. There are also certain other amendments which I shall bring forward at the proper time, when the act is under discussion.

Having laid this matter before the house and the government, I should like to move on now to a more general consideration of agriculture in our country. I believe this parliament is going to hear a great deal about agriculture for several reasons. One is that food is a basic commodity. It is one of the essentials of life. Agriculture is still the very backbone of the economy of this country. It is unfortunate that the prospects for agriculture at the present time do not appear particularly bright. It is also true that food is not only the most important commodity in our own country, but it is our best ambassador of good will abroad. As was so ably put by my own leader earlier this evening, a great deal can be accomplished in the field of foreign relations by contributions to the welfare of people who require food and the other essentials of life. We perhaps are in a very happy position in Canada in that respect, in that we can have a far greater influence upon world affairs than we ourselves realize if we go about it intelligently.

I said that prospects do not look particularly bright. The population figures with regard to agriculture themselves bear out that statement. Without going into detail, I may say that I was actually a little bit shocked to find, on looking up the statistics, that from 1941 to 1951, a period of ten years, during which the population of Canada generally increased more rapidly than it had been increasing previously, the farm population actually dropped by 250,000; in other words there were a quarter of a million fewer people living on the land than there were ten years previously. That in itself is a serious situation. With all due respect to city dwellers and to those who represent the great urban districts it is my opinion—and I say this seriously—that there is no comparison whatever between life in the rural

parts of Canada and life in our congested cities.

I do not say that at all in depreciation of the advantages enjoyed or the progress made by the large urban centres; they have made their contribution. But as one who has lived all his life in the rural part of Manitoba, I fail to see why anyone lives in a city unless it is because there are other people there. It seems to me that the bleak commercialism itself with which we are surrounded in the urban centres should be enough to drive the people out on the land.

But there are reasons why the people are leaving the land, and I shall state some of them in a moment. In the province of Manitoba itself the situation is perhaps even worse. With respect to the twenty-year period from 1931 to 1951, a period in which the farm population should have increased substantially, we find that there were 48,000 fewer people living on the land in 1951 compared with 1931. There is of course more than one reason for the drift away from the farms into the cities, but the result is that we are not only losing the population from the land but we are also throwing out of balance the whole distribution of population in Canada. We were already out of balance back in 1931, or even in 1941. When one looks at the map of our great country and sees that Canada actually begins west of the great lakes, and finds that the great bulk of the population is concentrated in the two central provinces, it is not a healthy thing for Canada.

I believe it would be a wonderful thing for the country if there could be a reasonable distribution of population throughout Canada, with more emphasis on rural population. It would be a wonderful thing not only from the point of view of our economy and the point of view of national defence, but also because there is something about rural life which builds character and provides a healthy body and a healthy mind, which are often lacking in the great urban centres. I mentioned the fact that the trend is from the farm to the city. I hope those who have left the farms have found satisfaction in the cities, but I doubt it very much.

The reasons for the trend are quite apparent. As was pointed out by the hon. member for Peace River (Mr. Low), the leader of the Social Credit group, the 20 per cent of the population represented by the farmers of the country receive only approximately 10 per cent of the national income. In such circumstances one is not surprised that young people from the farms should seek something different, a greater share of the national income to which they feel they are entitled, and no

[Mr. Zaplitny.]