

Alleged Failure to Aid Western Farmers

results of the minister's performance since he occupied this portfolio.

Many people have crossed the floor of this house and many will, but having listened to the minister today I must say that none has left so tortuous and twisted a trail in his political transformation, a trail that would break a snake's back to follow. Obviously, in his earlier political life, when the minister was a member of a party the political latitude and longitude of which is somewhere off to my left, he spent his time letting down empty buckets into empty wells. He is now frittering away his time trying to draw them up again.

As for the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau), he has made one or two incursions into agricultural matters, including his appearance at Winnipeg where he told the farmers that it was not his responsibility to sell wheat. I would only say in his case that his occasional flashes of rhetoric in regard to agricultural matters make his silences even more delightful.

We see today the result of six years of neglect. No, I will amend that.

Mr. Olson: Do you call the years 1964, 1965, 1966 and 1967, four years, years of neglect?

Mr. Baldwin: There was a time when an hon. gentleman from Calgary, who now occupies a position in the other place, held the minister's office. There were one or two occasions when he did some things of value to the agricultural industry. But this government and this minister have been absolutely irresponsible in their approach to the agricultural problems facing this country.

Their own words condemn them. I should like to refer to a speech made by the hon. gentleman at the O.E.C.D. agricultural ministers' meeting in Paris in November, 1968. During the course of the election campaign many of us had become aware of the problems and difficulties facing the agriculture community of this country unless some specific and concrete steps were taken. Yet, Mr. Speaker, the minister went to the O.E.C.D. ministerial conference at a time when, conscious of his responsibilities to the farming community of this country, he should have laid down the law in no uncertain terms. He must have realized at the time what was happening with regard to the international sale of wheat throughout the world. But all the minister said, as far as I can see having gone through his speech, was this. Having outlined some of

[Mr. Baldwin.]

the proposals which were being advanced, he said:

These, then, are some of our newer policies. They are helping to bring about increased efficiency, improved farm structure and higher incomes. They also are aimed towards market requirements. There is still some distance to go before our farmers get returns similar to those in other sectors with similar skills and investments.

The minister was playing "pat-a-cake" with the agricultural ministers of other countries that must, to the knowledge of the minister, have then been engaged in practices that were having a deleterious effect on our agricultural economy. When this government became involved in other international problems such as, for example, an educational conference held in Gabon—I am not going to go into the merits of these examples, even if I were allowed to—all hell broke loose because of the government's attempts to achieve the sort of international posture the government deemed desirable. As I say, I am not going to comment on that matter; but when it comes to the subject of agriculture, and the minister had both the opportunity and the audience to whom he should have been making representations, the quotation I put on record is the kind of clap-trap that was advanced.

Mr. Olson: Would the hon. gentleman permit a question? Would he like to be fair and point out that he did not read the whole speech? Nor, in fact, has he a copy of the other negotiations that were conducted. All my hon. friend has is the opening statement made at the meeting in Paris.

Mr. Baldwin: I have the whole speech, Mr. Speaker. I combed through it thoroughly, and this was the strongest part of it that I could find.

The minister also spoke to the Canadian Agricultural Congress at the Chateau Laurier Hotel on March 24 when the Magna Carta of the farmers was introduced. The Congress had set up a task force and new, brilliant, constructive and thoughtful policies were to emerge at that time. What did the minister say? On page 1 of the communique we find the following:

● (5:00 p.m.)

In the midst of this, individuals and their organizations have turned to government for leadership and assistance in reaching solutions to the problems they face.

Some leadership, Mr. Speaker! Some assistance! I continue:

I feel that I can say with certainty that they have received a sympathetic hearing from the governments to which they have appealed.