

of evolution in meeting the necessities of expanding domestic and export business.

My hon. friend has asked on what principle the Government proceeds and what will be its policy in future. I answer him that as long as the Bank Act remains as it is, unchanged by Parliament, it will be the duty of the Minister of Finance and of the Government to consider each application upon its merits, having regard to the interest not only of those who desire it, but of the public, and to reach such a conclusion as they fairly can as to whether the amalgamation should be permitted or not. That is the principle which has governed me in the discharge of the duties imposed upon me by Parliament under the Bank Act, and if there is any better policy which I could adopt, there is in this House no one more receptive to suggestion than I, because this is not a question in which any one has a personal interest, it is merely a matter of discharging a duty.

Mr. LEMIEUX: Has the minister received any protests, especially from the grain growers in the West, and farmers' organizations, against the various mergers which have taken place.

Sir THOMAS WHITE: From time to time I think resolutions have been received with regard to the general principle of bank amalgamations, and it may be that in connection with some amalgamations that have taken place some letters have been received, but generally speaking I do not recall any serious protests against bank amalgamations except such as I have seen in the press. And in those cases what I have observed is this, that while there is usually fairly strong criticism as soon as a bank amalgamation is announced, as a general rule, when the facts are made known, when it appears that the interests of all the parties mentioned have been regarded and that the public interest appears to be served, there is no further criticism. I pointed out to the House that the duty the minister has is one which subjects him to criticism, but nevertheless it is his duty so long as the Bank Act remains as it is, and in discharging that duty he must come to a conclusion as best he can, having regard to the public interests and the other considerations I have mentioned. While I do not think there are any papers that are of service to my hon. friend, if he desires to press his motion for a return, I have no objection.

Mr. LEMIEUX: If my hon. friend has no objection, I would be glad to get the papers.

Hon. W. S. FIELDING (Shelburne and Queens): Mr. Speaker, the question concerning the amalgamation of the Bank of Nova Scotia and the Bank of Ottawa, is, I am quite satisfied, merely one of sentiment, as has been stated by the two hon. gentlemen who have spoken. It is, of course, a sentiment we can all understand and respect. The question, however, is broader than that. We must admit that there is throughout the country a widespread feeling that there is a danger of the creation of what has been described as a money trust, and there is a further feeling that this amalgamation of banks tends to serve that end. I do not mention this for the purpose of endorsing it; I think it is magnified largely; but the very fact that there is such a state of alarm throughout the country, even if we do not all of us agree that it is justified, deserves the serious consideration of the House and particularly of the Minister of Finance. If we have been careful in the past with regard to granting these merging privileges, then the minister should feel that he needs to be more careful in the future in order that he may remove that opinion which exists. In the present state of unrest which exists throughout the country, I should feel disposed, in order to disarm it,—but for a single reason to which I shall allude—to suggest that that privilege which the Minister of Finance and the Government have now of permitting mergers be suspended, and that any bank desiring to merge with another shall have to come to Parliament for an Act. There is much to be said in favour of such a policy, and it would tend to remove the unrest which prevails. There is perhaps one difficulty in the matter. I do not know of a bank merger which has taken place, whether in the time of the Minister of Finance or in that of his predecessor, which has worked any harm. I do know of some cases in which unquestionably the merger did serve the public interest. In most cases to-day, however, the Dominion would get along very well if we had no more bank mergers. The man who agitates against what he calls a money trust and who denounces these bank mergers can make out a case which on the surface has some appearance of reason. Ten years ago we had thirty banks; to-day we have only nineteen; but although the banks have decreased in number, the resources in their hands have enormously increased, and, therefore, there is that concentration of money in the hands of comparatively few people which is