

league the Acting Minister of Finance (Mr. Robb) who delivered the budget speech on the 10th of April last. I am sure that irrespective of our agreement or otherwise with the contents of the budget we have all been impressed by the splendid example given by the acting minister in the brevity and conciseness of the annual financial statement he presented, a statement which, I am very glad to know, has been well received by the country from the Atlantic to the Pacific.

I cannot refrain, Sir, from also joining with my friends in expressing the deep regret we all feel at the absence from parliament this session, both from the councils of the government and from the work of the House generally, of the right hon. Minister of Finance (Mr. Fielding) and the former Minister of Justice (Sir Lomer Gouin). I am sure the Minister of Finance would have been delighted had he been able to be with us and present this budget, and be able at the same time to announce to the people of Canada, as he was in the very fortunate position of being able to do many times in the past, a surplus in the finances of this country—this being the first surplus since the year 1914. He would have also been very glad, in addition to announcing that surplus to be able to announce that we had reduced the public debt of this country, marking a return to the old-time Fielding surpluses of days gone by.

One cannot discuss the fiscal policy of this country without taking into consideration the very many difficulties that present themselves in governing a country such as Canada. All countries have their difficulties, and we have had our share undoubtedly during the past few years, since the armistice that concluded the Great War and during the period of re-establishment. Canada, as we all know, is a very extensive country, extending from the Atlantic to the Pacific, a territory long in range and narrow in extent, sparsely populated, and falling into what might be called four natural divisions. We have in the Maritime provinces, one of the old parts of confederation, a country small in area and composed principally of agriculturists, lumbermen, fishermen and miners, a little mining being done in Nova Scotia but not much in comparison with its other industries. Then we come to the old provinces of Quebec and Ontario, and while they are also interested in agriculture and forestry, they are much more interested in manufacturing than are the Maritime provinces. Then we go to the middle West and we find practically the whole population interested in agriculture. Further

[Mr. Copp.]

west, in British Columbia, we find the people engaged in agriculture, forestry and mining. When we consider the chief interests of the different portions of Canada, and how they vary with the different sections of this country from sea to sea, we can realize how difficult it is to arrange a fiscal policy that will suit all portions of the Dominion. We must examine into the requirements of the different parts of Canada, and then endeavour, so far as we are able to meet the conditions in the different sections of the country, having in mind always the interests of the country as a whole.

The responsibility of propounding and carrying into effect fiscal policies that are best applicable to a country such as Canada is one that is fraught with many difficulties. My hon. friends opposite have learned that to their sorrow. During the war period we all know that our whole time and attention were taken up in doing our part towards winning the war, and after the armistice and the conclusion of the war the duty rested upon my hon. friends opposite to take up the work of government and of re-establishment. I have no doubt that they grappled with those questions the best they could, but apparently, judging by the election returns of 1921, the people of this country were not satisfied with the way in which they had carried out their task. We realize that this responsibility has been handed over to us for the time being, and we have been giving these questions particular attention and very careful study during the past two years, and we have thought fit to bring before parliament at the present time some changes in the tariff and the fiscal policy of this country, for the consideration of parliament. The fiscal policy is a question that is always fraught with a very great deal of difficulty and differences of opinion. However, after giving this matter very careful study, we have taken the responsibility of placing before parliament the budget proposals which we are now asking it to accept. A great deal of opposition has risen in a certain quarter of this chamber in regard to these proposals, and I was delighted as I listened on Friday evening to the very excellent speech delivered by my hon. friend from Vancouver Centre (Mr. Stevens). He made mention of three different matters that I want to refer to briefly. In referring to the present government as opportunists—

An hon. MEMBER: Hear, hear.

Mr. COPP: I thought I heard someone say, "hear, hear." I am sure that when you