

*Supply—Agriculture*

middle and to relegate that department to a minor role in the affairs of the nation. I refer, of course, to the orders in council which were intended to strip the minister of his authority and which would have had the effect, had they not been rescinded, of destroying the effectiveness of one of our great departments of government. There was too much involved in this strange manoeuvre for either the official opposition or, to his credit, the Minister of Agriculture to stand idly by and see this happen. Because the Department of Agriculture has in the past played a very important part in bringing to the farming communities of the nation leadership, a measure of stability and assistance in times of stress, we believe it should continue to do so, provided it is given the opportunity by the government.

Frankly, Mr. Chairman, up to now the government has not shown the vigorous action that the Prime Minister in the election campaign promised if he were elected his government would take on behalf of agriculture. In that regard I should like to read into the record a short paragraph from an article in the April 9 issue of the *Family Herald* written by their Ottawa correspondent. He says in part:

It is still not clear what Mr. Pearson intends to do with the farm department—

Undoubtedly this delay is partly the cause for the Liberals' faltering record in agriculture. Since they took office, not a single piece of farm legislation has been passed by parliament. The measures that have been taken were by cabinet orders in council and these were few in number.

It may be that there is a glimmer of hope that the government can no longer ignore its responsibilities to agriculture in that we have finally had some farm legislation put on the order paper. I refer to the amendment to the Farm Credit Act.

We were also pleased to note that the minister indicated in a statement to the committee that he hoped to strengthen the liaison between the research organization of his department and the communities in which they are located. Everyone agrees that there is continuing need to stress the importance of good public relations between the scientists responsible for research and the general public. But research, to be most effective, must be made available to those individuals and commercial enterprises which can make practical use of it. Research is no more valuable anywhere than that carried out by our research stations and the experimental farms, where experiments are done under local conditions and where they can be of great benefit to the communities concerned. I think

[Mr. Muir (Lisgar).]

most of us will agree that our agricultural scientists are the equal of any in this field in the world, and any additional efforts which the department can put forward toward assisting our farmers in the improvement in the quality of their cereal grains, special crops and livestock is a step in the right direction. There is no doubt that this is a specific area where we can improve our competitive position in the markets of the world.

The other day the minister, in answer to a question I posed to him, assured us that the government intended to bring in legislation to reinsure the provinces against losses in their crop insurance programs. We certainly welcome this assurance because until such time as the provinces are reinsured they are hesitant about extending their programs in that regard beyond a regional or experimental stage. I had hoped that this legislation would also be put on the order paper in order to assure the provinces that they would be covered for the current crop year. Perhaps the minister can give us further assurance that this will be done.

Another problem I wish to bring to the attention of the committee is of vital importance to the western economy and of great concern to the farmers of the three prairie provinces. Since it comes under the jurisdiction of the minister and is part of his duties and functions I should like to impress upon him and the committee the prime importance of the matter of railway branch line abandonment in relation to the future well-being of agriculture. I hope that as the minister responsible he insists that a long, hard look be taken at any abandonment and that it is established beyond any shadow of doubt that the public interest is protected before consent to such abandonment is given.

Because of the widespread concern in the province of Manitoba caused by the proposed abandonment by the C.N.R. of practically all their trackage south of their main line between Winnipeg and Brandon, together with additional abandonments contemplated in that area by the C.P.R., a branch line association was set up last fall which has now become province wide and has made this particular problem a part of their concern. In fact, the statement issued by the association at that time reads as follows:

The recent announcement regarding abandonment of railway branch lines is causing concern in many sections of Manitoba and concern on the part of the many interests which will sooner or later be affected by such abandonment. A part of the anxiety is due to the extent of branch line abandonment which has been indicated to date and the importance that is attached to abandonment as a solution to the problems of the