

The Address—Right Hon. L. S. St. Laurent

do, anything which in the lights that providence has given us we would estimate to be beneficial, to enable us to conserve that confidence.

We realize, as do the hon. gentleman and his friends, the importance to the economy of this nation of our agricultural population. We know, as he knows, that the P.F.R.A. has produced very beneficial results in the western provinces. We know, as he knows—perhaps I know this a little more intimately—that in my own province of Quebec there are people who are doing back-breaking work on land which does not yield them a proper income. I do not think that that is really inevitable in our country. I think that intelligent industry properly applied can yield in this country an income sufficient for a man and his family to live upon.

That happens, not only in the maritime provinces where it exists to quite an extent but in Quebec and in some portions of Ontario. Over a considerable period of time there have been large numbers of farmers in eastern Canada who have been making ends meet only because we have been buying butter from them at 58 cents a pound and have been buying rather more than has been actually consumed up to the present time.

But the population of Canada is increasing and my colleague here does not think that the problem of surplus butter is going to be of very long duration. I know I am eating more than my doctor thinks I should, but I am not making very great inroads into the surpluses that have accumulated. But our population is increasing by means of very satisfactory immigration and also by very satisfactory natural increases.

I was at one of the parishes in my constituency just before New Year's and the parish priest told me that there had been 550-odd baptisms and less than 100 burials in his parish during 1956. I think that was a most satisfactory situation. I cannot give that as an example of what is going on throughout the whole province because this is a new parish in which a lot of young people have purchased home lots. The proportion of home owners in that parish is larger than in any other parish of the city of Quebec and that young population is doing its best to increase our over-all population.

Our over-all population is going to have to be fed. This means that with probably something less than the present area of land under cultivation in eastern Canada, very much more has to be produced. This population is not going to remain at 16 million. I do not know what the figure will be a couple of decades from now but there will be very

[Mr. St. Laurent (Quebec East).]

many more than there are at the present time, and I think the fertility of the soil fit for agriculture in eastern Canada can produce enough even for a doubling of the population in eastern Canada. But that is something which requires some attention from all the authorities. The jurisdiction in respect of this matter is generally looked upon as being the jurisdiction and responsibility of the provinces, but there is also the provision in the British North America Act that there is joint legislative jurisdiction in the federal parliament and in the provincial legislatures.

The investigation by the Senate committee will not be completed during the present session of parliament. It is something that will probably go on for much more than one session, but it will focus the attention of the public on the problem and will afford a forum to which those who know much better than I do how the problem can be dealt with and cured may come and state their views and have them publicized throughout the country. I think it will bring about an atmosphere in which the Canadian public in their threefold capacity of municipal electors, provincial electors and federal electors are going to want to have something done to bring about an improved situation. I know from some things that have happened in my own lifetime that when our farming population is shown how to do a thing better and shown that it is profitable to do it in the better way, they do come around and do it in the better way.

The maple product is a typical example of that. It took a certain number of years, but now the product of practically everyone who goes to the trouble of tapping maple trees is of prime quality and commands high prices. I know of tree fruit and small fruit growing. I know of the production of sunflower seeds, of alfalfa hay and things of that kind which have been used in certain parts but have not yet become general throughout the whole locality, and which do bring about an increase in production and an increase in income that will make life more attractive than it has been on those farms where young people see their parents doing very much more hard work than is compensated for by the returns they get from their farms.

I think that matter can be studied in the Senate to the great advantage of the Canadian public, and it will be a good thing for the status of the Senate to have the public of Canada realize what a useful job they will be doing in investigating that problem.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!