

The Address—Mr. Baldwin

majority of the members. This is my fifth parliament. I have never been convinced that governments and their senior advisers have that degree of infallibility that suggests we should follow them without question—certainly not the government which now faces us across the floor of the house.

I think this is an admirable time, particularly suited to the new rules which we have adopted, for governments in bringing in legislation, in bringing down spending proposals, to accept the principle that they are agreeable to alter, to amend and to have changes brought about either by agreement—as was the case with the rules which we established on Friday—or by vote of the house. After all, Mr. Speaker, I think the majority of the 265 men and women here representing the people of Canada are entitled to say to the government under those conditions, when the people have so voted and their representatives have so voted, "You have a plain duty cast upon you to conform and to adapt your attitude to ours".

Equally, Mr. Speaker, even if the government should take a more serious view, their resignation need not necessarily be followed by dissolution. I think this course is their last resort. I believe we must come to a very serious situation which is the height of gravity before the government and the Prime Minister take this course. I suggest that the Prime Minister and the government should re-assess and review their position in the light of the changed circumstances which this minority parliament, following two other minority parliaments, considers itself to be in. Precedent, I repeat, can be followed. Precedent can also be established. This, Mr. Speaker, is a time for us to establish precedent.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Baldwin: Now, Mr. Speaker, I wish to direct my remarks to a more local issue but one which I think is also fundamental to some of the tasks which face this parliament. I deal now with the situation facing many thousands of people in the Peace River country who have experienced hardship and distress throughout the course of several years and whose difficulties have been accentuated this year by the third poor crop in successive years as a result of adverse weather conditions. Because there have been certain incorrect statements made in this regard I think it is essential to put the whole issue and all the facts on the record.

[Mr. Baldwin.]

I direct my remarks to the Minister of Agriculture and to the Prime Minister as well. I realize, of course, that the Minister of Agriculture has only recently taken over his responsibilities and I realize that this is a problem which he has inherited. Nevertheless I think there is a fundamental issue here stemming far beyond his immediate rejection of the request of the people of the Peace River country and the province of Alberta.

• (12:30 p.m.)

I would first point out that the area involved in the Peace River country constitutes some 80,000 square miles with 10,000 farm units. It is a vast inland empire with a variety of weather, just as different and changeable as the record of this government with regard to its budget and the pension plan. In 1963, 1964 and this year large areas of the Peace River country involving almost 20 per cent of the farm units—which in terms of people could be between 8,000 and 10,000—sustained very severe losses. Much of this country is in the homestead stage. We have attempted to build up an area on the perimeter of civilization. This is not an area, at least most of it is not, in which there is a long record of agricultural operation. These are people who have gone into the far north, into a new country, and are attempting to carve out a living for themselves and their families.

Now, according to correspondence I have received and from trips I have made, there are indications of serious hardships and a large measure of distress in these areas. Many farmers have had to sell parts of their farm units to pay their debts. Basic herds of cattle have had to be sold in order to pay debts. These cattle were sold at prices which were entirely uneconomical. The cattle had not been fattened and were not ready for sale.

The position of the head of the household under these circumstances is not what it is in other parts of the country. In order to secure employment many of these men must go 50, 60 or 70 miles. There is not a considerable body of industry there. The type of work which is available is connected with oil development, forestry or pipe line building. This means the men have to leave their families at home under weather conditions which, during periods of this winter, have seen temperatures of 40 or 50 degrees below zero.

I could go into a considerable amount of detail concerning these conditions. However, I ask the house to accept my word that there