

The Address—Mr. Boutin

It is not the statistics themselves that should be questioned, but their interpretation. Generally, they do not give a true picture of the situation prevailing among the majority of our farmers, that is those who own a normal-sized farm.

When those statistics show that the yearly average income of Quebec farmers is from \$1,500 to \$1,800, I wonder if they include the average income of farmers in the county of Dorchester and neighbouring counties. Very few, in our area, belong to this privileged class.

In some areas of the province of Quebec where the soil is tillable, where a minimum of work is required due to soil fertility, income is higher than the figures mentioned in the statistics given a moment ago. But one must tour many counties to notice that the conditions of work and success are quite different from one area to another. Then it is easy to understand that the income of some farmers is much larger than the income of certain other Quebec farmers.

In order to get a better idea of the present situation, and to realize in particular that some areas are actually depressed, such statistical data should be collected in every individual county or region. It would then be found that, in some places, where people are still set on preserving the family farm, their income is definitely inadequate to allow a family to live decently.

The Catholic farmers' union is justified in saying in its 1962-63 report:

No wonder then that farmers are to be found in such alarming proportions on the labour market and are willing to take on any job available in order to supplement a definitely inadequate farm income.

Mr. Speaker, this finding of the Catholic farmers' union is truly indicative of the situation in my riding. Farm income is much too low and taxes of all kinds are too high.

I should like to refer again to the union's report which states:

Following the building up of rural areas and the development of education at all levels, the present land tax structure which is the main source of local income of municipalities and school boards seriously jeopardizes the economic development of farmland.

The present situation has developed progressively but it has become serious of late.

In 1961, the Catholic farmers' union decided to carry out an investigation in a certain number of parishes in all parts of the province. On the basis of the information supplied to us by the municipal and school board secretaries, we found that the municipal levy against farms is \$209.86 as compared with \$100 for non-agricultural properties and that the school tax is \$211.81 and \$100 respectively.

In 1960, land taxes paid by farms in Quebec accounted for 13.4 per cent of the net average income of farmers.

Those figures show the problem quite clearly. Even if the proportion is about the same as far as municipal and school taxes are concerned, the situation is more tragic in the latter case because school taxes are generally higher.

In the taxation field, the farmer is in a rather unfavourable position resulting from the primary requirement of his profession, that is he must exercise his activity on a piece of land often extending over a hundred acres. No such requirement exists in any other profession.

The abovementioned figures are average figures. In certain places, it has been established that farm owners pay as much as four times more school or municipal taxes than do non-agricultural property owners. And in most localities, it is noted that the land tax is no longer proportionate to the farmer's ability to pay. In fact, it tends to devalue arable soil and discourages any new productive investment on farms. It constitutes a limiting factor in the development and consolidation of farms.

In addition, the farmer is unable to cover his cost price with the sale of his products, because the price of commodities is fixed on the free market or at a minimum level set by the federal government. The situation is untenable.

It is no wonder therefore that to make both ends meet, farm workers are more and more compelled to become farm loggers or farmer labourers or to work in any trade that will enable them to face their farm obligations.

But a few years of this system bear disastrous results. In fact, we see farm work becoming the secondary occupation of those people, and before long those farms will be definitely deserted. Population in rural parishes is decreasing at a disastrous rate from year to year; we are witnessing an exodus of the rural population towards the city.

In support of these statements, I shall quote a few figures taken from official statistics. A detailed study of the changes that occurred in production, distribution and demand reveals that even though the employment level increased in some industries, this increase took place at the expense of the agricultural classes. From 1946 to 1961, total employment in agriculture decreased from 25 per cent to 11 per cent, while total employment for all classes increased by approximately 30 per cent. If manpower continues to decrease at this alarming rate, what will remain 15 years hence?