

Agriculture Federation Brief Before Commission

Prince Edward Island's main dependence on agriculture, and the problems associated with this industry in production, processing and marketing, were emphasized in a brief presented yesterday by the P. E. I. Federation of Agriculture before the Royal Commission on Canada's Economic Prospects. Following is the text of the brief, as prepared by Mr. J. Lincoln Dewar:

The Prince Edward Island Federation appreciates the opportunity of presenting a statement before the commission. We recognize the fact that your Commission has a most important and far-reaching assignment in appraising Canada's economic prospects. We believe the present time is an opportune one for such an appraisal and we are convinced that the deliberations of this Commission will be of marked importance and value in the charting of the economic paths which the Canadian people are likely to follow in the coming years.

It is not the intention to have this brief deal with national questions nor is it the intention for it to deal with the general economy of this Province. The material to be presented will deal only with agricultural matters pertaining to this Province and will digress into broader fields only where there would appear to be a clear relationship.

PEOPLE AND POPULATION

The population of Prince Edward Island has, for the most part, consisted of the descendants of the original French, Scottish, Irish, and to a lesser extent English pioneers. During the past decade there has been added to these races a substantial number of people from the Netherlands with a few from other European countries. The population is, therefore, composed of people who are traditionally good agriculturists. This, coupled with the fact that both the soil and climate of Prince Edward Island are extremely favourable, has made of Canada's outstanding agricultural farms and agriculture in general a Province. Prince Edward Island is a Maritime province that in point of value and number of people employed, the most important industry. Few rural societies are able to absorb the natural population increase and this has been true for many years in this Province. After 1891 immigration to the New England States, followed a few decades later by the movement to Western Canada, produced a marked decline in the total population.

From 1881 to 1941 the rural population decreased by almost twenty-five thousand. This trend is still in evidence with the farm population decreasing both relatively and absolutely. At the moment there is nothing to indicate any reversal as farm mechanization will make it possible to effect a saving in manpower while maintaining at approximately the same level the production of crops and products which lend themselves to mechanization and large scale operations. Our Organization believes that the population has the aptitude, ingenuity, and resourcefulness together with a reasonable love for the soil which under reasonably favourable conditions should have produced better results than is the case in many localities. It is in part the purpose of this Brief to discuss in a general way some of the factors which have had and may continue to have an adverse effect upon agricultural developments.

TRANSPORTATION

Transportation is normally a problem with any Island and in particular with small Islands which are located at great distances from their markets. The natural markets for our farm products are the cities of the Atlantic seaboard but political decisions and tariff arrangements shut us out of these markets which could be cheaply supplied by water. At the present time the only market of real value in the area is that existing for seed potatoes. Island potato shippers are free to make use of steamers of foreign registry which provide much cheaper haulage than is the case of ships of American registry which Maine potato growers market. These growers are the chief competitors of the Island for that seed potato market. Should anything come to adversely affect this advantage, the Island seed potato industry would suffer.

Transportation is one of the largest expenses charged against our production and affects not only the value of our sales but the cost of the equipment and raw materials used in production. Therefore, it follows that any change in freight rates can have a marked effect upon the Island economy. It can be expected that within the not too distant future a marked lowering of air freight rates will take place, possibly to the extent of 50 percent. Lower air freight rates will be of marked significance in encouraging the production of a wider variety of small fruits and products which can be economically concentrated.

For example, the development of an instantly soluble whole milk powder would be of utmost importance to the Island dairy industry. Such a product is one which could be transported by air into Newfoundland and Labrador.

Slow but steady progress has been made over the years in the provision of ferry service between Bordentown-Tormentine and Wood Islands-Cariboo - the latter service operating for seven months of the year. It would appear logical and may be accepted as a certainty that the Port of Georgetown, one of the most important of the Island, will be used as the Island terminal for a winter ferry service operating either to Pictou or a point in Cape Breton. The automobile and bus and modern standards of living do not permit economic liberation, hence the importance of maintaining transportation at a high level of efficiency throughout the winter months.

The effect of the St. Lawrence Seaway project is a story which only the future can tell. Unquestionably its development will be beneficial to Canada but it is not at all certain that these benefits will be shared by the Maritimes. In fact, there could be very real difficulties particularly if it solves the problem of keeping the St. Lawrence open during the winter months. Should this come about, the Ports of St. John and Halifax would suffer severely.

Increasing rail freight rates will have the effect of forcing Island producers either to use alternative forms of transportation or to produce less bulk products of a higher relative value. While water transportation is economical, yet this advantage has not been used to any marked extent. Rail transportation will continue to be expensive. Relief to the Island in this field would appear to rest with modern developments and economies in highway trucking and air transport.

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Princess Edward Island's major contribution in the field of national building has been in the export of its young people together with the investment involved in educating them. Meritorious as this contribution has been it is one which the Island's economy is in a poor position to sustain and one which must soon be recognized in a tangible way.

We do not believe that the Federal authority can much longer make its basic responsibilities in the educational field. We, therefore, look forward with considerable confidence to Federal assistance in educational standards for the entire population with a lessening of the heavy burden so long carried on the shoulders of rural people. Social and economic development among our rural people will, to a large extent, depend upon a greater interest in education.

SUMMARY

Prince Edward Island dependent mainly on agriculture and the tourist industry cannot likely expect any great economic expansion. It is a mature economy and while there has been an increase in physical volume of agricultural production since 1946, this has been the farmer's answer to meeting higher costs with cheaper products. Even if the Maritimes were to become self sufficient in food production within the next twenty-five years, it is doubtful if the industry would employ more people. Agricultural progress in this Province will depend in part upon the following:

- (a) The development on the part of the farmer of a greater respect for his own occupation and the acquiring of a real sense of worth in the economic community.
- (b) The paying of greater attention to methods of marketing and the Atlantic Region markets.
- (c) Marketing practice in agriculture must be brought up to a similar standard of efficiency as existing in other industries, otherwise increased production will do little to increase income.
- (d) Extension work by government departments should be directed more towards processing, storage and marketing rather than towards production.
- (e) Increased attention to the farm woodlot can play an important part in supplementing farm income.
- (f) Provision of better transportation facilities, all-weather roads and cheap power will play an increasing net income.

IMMIGRATION

The performance of immigrants from the temperate zone of Europe justifies the placing of such new Canadians on available and suitable farm lands. The immigrants bring with him a fresh approach, new ideas, and originality. He places a high value on land and his contribution in the form of new

skill and culture is of definite value. (h) Intensification of production and improvement of the quality is indicated if competition is to be met.

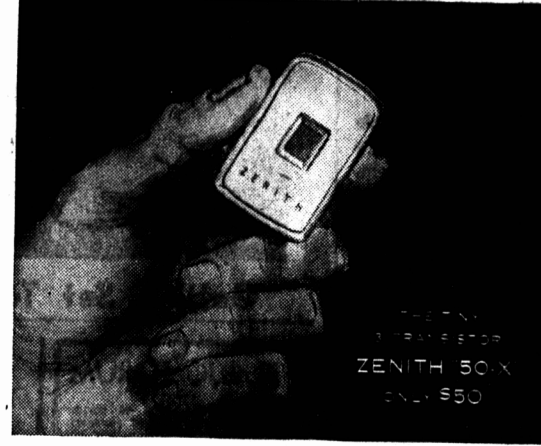
- (i) The development of joint and community ownership of heavier mechanized farm equipment will be of material assistance in sustaining the family farm as a unit.
- (j) More attention must be paid to vocational education for agriculture to the end that young farmers will be better equipped with scientific knowledge and practical skills.
- (k) The high cost of establishing farms suggests the necessity of establishing better credit facilities for agriculture.
- (l) The rural community holds within itself the power to strengthen the nation. This power can only be applied when the members of the community learn to study, work and play together. While there is no wholesale force which can be applied to change or improve the rural community as a social and citizenship building unit, it is suggested that the rural community will benefit during the next quarter century by a greater use of study groups, kitchen meetings, library service, periodicals, radio, Continued on page 5

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