

us to think again and perhaps revise our opinion?

At six o'clock, committee took recess.

After Recess.

Committee resumed at eight o'clock.

Mr. R. L. BORDEN. I would like to ask the Prime Minister as to one matter that I do not think has been very clearly brought out by any information laid before the House, and that is what quantity of actually good land there is in the Northwest in each of these provinces, suitable for agricultural purposes. The reason I ask is that a rather extraordinary statement was made by one of the hon. gentlemen from the Northwest, the hon. member for Strathcona (Mr. Talbot). In the first place he says:

There is another reason why it is best for the federal government to administer those lands. It may not be considered a good reason by some, but I think the experience of most of the other provinces will give some weight to it. It is this. We might at some future time have a careless or extravagant government in one or both of the new provinces. If such a thing did happen our resources would rapidly disappear, and we might in a very few years be compelled to appeal to extensive direct taxation.

I myself would not be inclined to think there was any greater danger in that regard from entrusting the lands to provincial control than from leaving them in the control of the government of Canada. There is certainly no more reason to apprehend a reckless or extravagant government in the Territories than there is to apprehend such a government in the Dominion as a whole. Further than that, the direct and immediate interest of the people, the circumstances that the disposal of the lands would be a matter of immediate local concern, would seem to me to give greater security in that regard if they were under provincial control than that which might be expected to result from Dominion control. However, the hon. gentleman of course is entitled to his opinions in that regard. But he went on to say something else:

Some hon. gentlemen on the other side of the House would like to make the public believe that all the lands in these vast areas are agricultural lands. Such is far from being the case. In fact only a small portion of those lands will ever be fit for agricultural purposes. Millions of acres are under water. Millions more consist of muskeg and slough, while millions more are sand hills and barren. There is no doubt there is an immense quantity of good agricultural land in the country, but it is only a fraction of the whole.

I would have been inclined to expect my hon. friend the Minister of the Interior (Mr. Oliver) to rise in his wrath, as well as in his might, and assail the hon. gentleman who made that statement about the lands in the Northwest, but I have not heard from him in that regard up to

Mr. W. F. MACLEAN.

date. It is a pretty sweeping description. I am not inclined to agree with the hon. member for Strathcona so far as some of these statements are concerned, that is, from the information which I have been enabled to gather with respect to the quality of the land in the Northwest. I do not think that the hon. gentleman's observations are borne out by any information we have before the House at the present time. But when statements of that kind are made by hon. gentlemen who come here from the Northwest, they would seem to me to merit some attention from the government, and I think we should have some statement before the committee as to the proportion of good land available for agricultural purposes in the two new provinces.

Sir WILFRID LAURIER. I am sorry that at this moment I cannot give my hon. friend information as to the exact quantity of good land which is available for agricultural purposes in these two new provinces. I could, however, make an effort to have a computation made, which I will do, and hope to place in his hands at a very early date. Such information ought to be available. I agree with my hon. friend that there is no more probability of a reckless government existing in those provinces than there is here at Ottawa. We remember that there has been a reckless government at Ottawa in the past, and there may be again. But if there is a reckless government at Ottawa, the consequences to the people in the depletion of their assets would be less grave than would be the case if there was a reckless government in the Northwest Territories. If the lands were left under the control of the provinces the temptation would be very great to waste them, as the lands would afford them a ready asset to meet their liabilities; whereas if there were such a thing as a reckless government in Ottawa, they would have other resources to draw upon besides the lands. Therefore I should think the observation of the hon. member for Strathcona was not without some foundation. As to the character of the lands, I must say that I am a little surprised at the description given of them by my hon. friend from Strathcona. My impression at the present time is that, with a very small exception, especially in the province of Saskatchewan, all the lands are available, either for ranching or for agriculture, by far the greater proportion. I do not know how much waste land there is. I understand there is very little swamp land, as there is in Manitoba. At the same time, I cannot give the information to my hon. friend he asks for, but when we take up this question again I hope to be able to give him the information.

Mr. LAKE. I wish to make the remark, amongst others, that no money is sufficient to compensate the people of the Northwest for the loss of their lands. The administration from Ottawa is a serious in-