

*The Address—Mr. Diefenbaker*

received regarding it he would learn that his statement certainly is not appreciated by the western farmer.

**Mr. Argue:** The horse and buggy minister.

**Mr. Diefenbaker:** Oh, yes; back to the horse and buggy days, and everything will be well. Whether or not that was what he meant, certainly the western farmer is aroused as he has not been for a long while over being condemned for a responsibility which rests upon this government. The Minister of Trade and Commerce (Mr. Howe) rises from day to day and says that all is well. But letters keep coming in from farmers in every part of the country, advising that the situation is becoming more serious every day. They say it is impossible to understand who are the advisers of the Minister of Trade and Commerce who provide him with the misinformation which he gives to the House of Commons and the country. I read from an editorial in the *Western Producer* of November 8, entitled "Grain Congestion". After complimenting the Minister of Trade and Commerce as a hard-working member of the cabinet it says:

One is reluctant to criticize Mr. Howe but he has left no alternative. As reported in our news columns—there is no need to go over the details here—he made a statement last week which indicated a deplorable misinterpretation of the present situation in relation to the movement of western grain. While admitting that there is a problem and that there is congestion he proceeded to make light of the whole matter. He seemed to convey the impression that those who were expressing serious alarm at the gravity of the situation were crying before they were hurt; that if they exercised a little patience they would discover that they were really not going to be hurt at all.

We do not know by whom Mr. Howe is briefed, on whom he relies for the evidence on which he bases his conclusions, but we can assure him that he has been badly misled. In recent issues of this paper an accurate picture of conditions in Saskatchewan, accompanied by detailed maps, has been given. These, we submit prove beyond argument that we are confronted with an emergency which may spread disaster among thousands of grain growers, the effects of which will be felt throughout Canada as well as by consumers overseas. Far from being a temporary condition of a seasonal nature there is every indication that it springs from basic shortcomings in the transportation system, long dormant, but which have now come glaringly to light.

Whatever the responsibility may be, and on whoever it may rest, I do ask the government to act, to exert extra pressure upon the controller and also upon the wheat board and the railway companies to assure that the branch lines will receive at least a greater measure of consideration than they have had since the beginning of this harvest season. It is one of the most colossal catastrophes that have ever struck the western prairies. There was a crop the like of which we had not had in our history. There is \$200 million worth of crop not threshed as yet, and

[Mr. Diefenbaker.]

approximately \$125 million worth out in the fields in piles. I do not say the government can do everything, but they can do something more than periodically issue airily worded optimistic messages that may give solace to the government and its supporters, but no comfort to the western farmer.

One more word, sir, and I am through. I have been very much impressed, as I know every hon. member from Saskatchewan has been, by the number of hon. members from eastern Canada in the opposition who have publicly given their support to the South Saskatchewan river irrigation project. That is not something new on their part. I read in the *Star-Phoenix* an editorial to the effect that if the same stand had been taken by His Majesty's loyal opposition before this commission was set up the government might have acted. Well, memories are short. Throughout the years when Mr. Bracken was leader of this party this project had his support. In February, 1949, only two and a half years ago speaking in this House of Commons in the presence of and with the authority of the leader of this party we asked the government to go ahead with this work and promised our support. The project would have the support of every member of the opposition. It is part of a great national plan of development to assure productivity on the western prairies, in particular in Saskatchewan, year in and year out, in place of those areas being subjected to continuing drought as they have been since 1890.

At first the attitude of the government was that the engineers had to determine whether or not it was a feasible scheme. Various engineers considered the matter, and finally over a year ago the feasibility was decided upon. The engineers came to this conclusion, and I read from the report:

It is feasible to irrigate about 500,000 acres in central Saskatchewan and at the same time to produce about 475 million K.W.H. of hydroelectric energy annually.

In a return brought down on June 29, 1951, in answer to questions asked by me, there were set forth the advantages of this scheme in so far as population is concerned. Until quite recently the population in that part of Saskatchewan has been decreasing year by year. The facts are set forth in the report of the engineers, which says this will mean a great increase in the income of many farmers. It will mean an increase in population. It will bring about a resettlement of the areas that have been deserted. There will be a tremendous saving in relief expenditures that have amounted in recent years to an average of \$368,000. This project is necessary if defence production in this country is to be