

*The Address—Mr. Fane*

I did forget, Mr. Speaker, one further reference to agriculture. The Speech says:

Canadians have benefited from good harvests and a high level of demand for our farm products.

That may be the case in some places but throughout my constituency the farming business has not been considered to be as good as it might have been over the last two years.

I think, Mr. Speaker, I will devote a short time to speaking about agriculture and the difficulties faced by farmers in my constituency. As you know, I represent the constituency of Vegreville, which is in the east-central part of Alberta and comprises some 5,500 square miles. The main industry there is agriculture, though we do have some oil, gas, and coal mining industries and a chemical plant. However, the main industry is agriculture.

I am pleased to see that we have a new Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Greene) and I wish to congratulate him on being given what is to my mind the most important portfolio in any government. He has, I am sure, taken over a bigger job than he realizes because he has to undo all the harm done by his predecessor over the last three years.

I notice that he was not slow to approve a \$30 million grant in foreign aid by way of agricultural products to nations less fortunate than ourselves. But what is he going to do for the farmers of western Canada? What about those in the Peace River district who lost their crops in 1965 and most of the farmers in Alberta who lost their crops in 1964? You may say that 1964 is old stuff now but I assure you, Mr. Speaker, it is not because the prairie farm assistance branch has only just recently released the findings of the 1964 board of review of appeals and awards under the Prairie Farm Assistance Act. Their final meeting was held, I believe, on November 25 last and I received the report on January 6. This is why I still talk about 1964 prairie farm assistance.

● (4:20 p.m.)

In 1964 the agricultural industry in my constituency met with a severe reverse. Conditions were comparable with those which occurred in the Ottawa Valley last year. No one who lives around here would deny that this presented a most unpleasant situation for the farmers of the region. Even in this area of Canada, one which has been settled for many generations, assistance was required. Most of the farmers in my constituency, in

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the area of which I am speaking, suffered heavy losses. Prairie farm assistance inspectors went round, made their inspections and recommended in most instances that payment should be made. There are 12 townships in which I am particularly interested at this time. For the benefit of those who do not know what a township is, may I explain that a township consists of 36 sections in a square block or an area 6 miles square. The 12 townships I have mentioned were approved for awards under the Prairie Farm Assistance Act. Later, however, approval was withdrawn because it was found that one or two farmers in each of those townships had given wrong information, whether on purpose or accidentally I am not in a position to say. But each township was cut out on account of those few people.

I held two meetings with the director of the Prairie Farm Assistance Act. He came to my house once and we spent four or five hours together. The next occasion was on January 6 when he came to Edmonton for the sole purpose of discussing this situation with me again after the board of review had completed its deliberations. The director informs me that he is not personally responsible for the mix-up; he has taken his orders from higher up. The board of review has summarily thrown out these areas which I have mentioned and has decided they are not eligible. The decision imposes a great hardship on people who really deserve consideration. This situation must be thoroughly investigated.

I do not want anybody to think that payments under the Prairie Farm Assistance Act are a direct gift from the government. They are not. Every farmer who sells grain to the Canadian Wheat Board pays 1 per cent of his cash receipts from the grain toward this fund. Certainly the premiums do not always cover the payments which are required. At times the government is required to put up an amount equal to what the farmers contribute. But if the government does subsidize the most important industry in Canada so far as the life of this nation is concerned to the relatively small extent I have mentioned, its action is not out of the way at all and there should certainly be no complaint about it.

Since I came to this house almost eight years ago I have worked steadily with every Minister of Agriculture to bring about a Prairie Farm Assistance Act amended in such a way that payments can be made on a one-section basis instead of a twelve-section