

*The Budget—Mr. McCusker*

armed forces. Those boys and girls not in the forces were attracted to eastern industry. They married and did not return. Upon their return from the war, our soldiers were absorbed in the industry of the east, for which they had been trained when they were in the army. In ten years we in Saskatchewan lost 98,000 people; that is, between the years 1936 and 1946. This was owing to unsatisfactory economic conditions caused by poor crops and lack of industrial employment due to lack of cheap hydroelectric power. Since 1946 we have regained 43,000 of our population; but once again manufacturing incidental to our defence preparations in the east is draining off our young and skilled people. The nature of our farming operations has changed and in this new mechanized age we employ fewer men. The disturbing feature of our agricultural situation today is that the farms are being operated by an older-age group who will leave no relatives on the land when the age of retirement is reached. What is the solution to this problem? The solution lies in irrigation and power development.

You will remember that in 1949, in the first session of this parliament, I spoke on the serious position that Regina and Moose Jaw found themselves in owing to lack of water. I explained the reason for this situation and outlined the measures which should be adopted to bring them relief. I am glad to say that my recommendations were accepted and that today the solution of that problem is in sight. With the irrigation and power development there will arise the important problem of soil conservation and water conservation.

You are aware that much of the poverty and desolation of the Mediterranean countries today is due to faulty soil and water conservation there in the past. As you come up the coast of the Mediterranean toward Tel Aviv you suddenly emerge from barren land and pass into a veritable paradise. This land has been reclaimed and put into productivity by irrigation. Today it is our duty to protect our land in Canada.

In southwestern Saskatchewan and in southeastern Alberta there is a large area which should have been retained for grazing; it was unwisely opened for settlement. This land cannot fully support the people now living upon it. The Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Act has helped considerably in solving this problem, but much remains to be done. As irrigated land becomes available, many of the people will be moved off this land to which I have referred, and the rest will be able to support themselves by being given a greater acreage to till and

graze. Near Lethbridge there is one area where, owing to irrigation, the population has increased 250 per cent in twenty years; and Lethbridge today is one of the most prosperous communities in Canada.

Irrigation is no longer an experiment. It has been tried and found successful in Alberta and in some parts of Saskatchewan. The project in Alberta will eventually develop 1,750,000 acres and in Saskatchewan 750,000 acres. In addition, the Saskatchewan project will develop 400 million kilowatt hours of saleable electric energy per annum, sufficient hydroelectric energy to supply the present needs of the province.

The South Saskatchewan river development project has been under study and in the public eye for a number of years, and the time has now arrived when we should proceed with its construction. It is necessary for all concerned to give their earnest attention to the place of this project in the national economy of Canada, and to study the data collected on all phases of the project from which a decision can be reached. A report covering all phases of this project has been tabled. It has been compiled by experts.

Many public references are made on the failure of irrigation projects in the past. Private companies such as the Canadian Pacific Railway have pioneered irrigation over forty years and it is from these experiences and similar ones in the United States that many lessons have been learned. It is now recognized by most governments that the total capital costs of the project should not be properly chargeable to the land. Experience in Alberta shows that the farmer alone does not benefit from the investment. Transportation companies, manufacturers, processing companies, distributors and business generally enjoy in total far greater benefits than the farmer.

By arrangement between federal and provincial governments, it is usually accepted that the federal government should stand the cost of impounding the water and that the provincial government should stand the cost of its distribution. The provincial government has the opportunity of recovering part of its expenditures by charges for water. The federal government usually regains its capital investment through increased revenues. Over a period of thirty-five years in the United States the government has recovered its entire investment in irrigation.

The history of irrigation has made it possible to assess the value of any new project and before the construction is undertaken the following factors must be studied.