

Peace River Railway Outlet

PEACE RIVER RAILWAY OUTLET

Mr. D. M. KENNEDY (Peace River) moved:

That, in the opinion of this house, the Peace River country should be connected by a direct railway outlet to the Pacific coast.

He said: I realize that the house may be somewhat impatient at the introduction once more of this subject, because I have spoken on it so many times in this chamber. Every time I rise now to discuss the subject I am reminded of the predicament of a Presbyterian minister in Scotland who preached the same sermon on two succeeding Sundays. Two of his elders were busy complaining about it when the beadle came up and asked them what the sermon was about. Neither of them knew, so the beadle said, "We shall have to ask the minister to preach that sermon again." That is the reason I am bringing up again this question of a direct outlet for the Peace River country, notwithstanding the fact that this is the tenth or twelfth debate on it; for it is still a matter that calls for action.

I do not want to take up much of the time of the house this afternoon dealing with statistics or in any unnecessary repetition because I think the subject is pretty well known to hon. members. The Peace River country was settled about 1910, and from 1910 to 1920 a population of 20,000 settlers became established in that district. We had another wave of settlement between 1927 and 1931. During those years about 1,000,000 acres of land were developed and intensely cultivated, and about another 5,000,000 acres were alienated from the crown to settlers. The population in 1920 stood around 20,000 and to-day it is 40,000.

A great many people ask why settlers went into that country. Well, they went chiefly because the Canadian Northern Railway in 1910 was surveying a route through to the Pacific coast, through the Peace River country, via Grande Prairie, and on westward to the Pacific. I remember being told in 1911 in Grande Prairie by some Canadian Northern Railway engineers that inside of three years we should have direct connection with the Pacific coast. However, the Canadian Northern story is familiar to the house. That railway was not built through, but later the Edmonton and Dunvegan railway was built from Edmonton to the Peace River country, and that is the railway that serves that country to-day.

We were promised an outlet in 1911. In 1922 Sir Henry Thornton made a statement regarding the conditions under which he as head of the Canadian National Railways

[Mr. MacLean.]

would be willing to recommend an outlet. This statement of his has been abused and misrepresented. The statement was to the effect that when the Peace River country produced 10,000,000 bushels of wheat for three successive years, or the equivalent in tonnage for export, he would be willing to recommend the construction of a Peace River outlet. I shall not take up the time of the house going into details. Suffice it to say that we have reached the point not of 10,000,000 but of 12,000,000 bushels and if you take the equivalent tonnage in cattle, timber and so on you will find that we have had that 10,000,000 bushels or the equivalent in tonnage not for three years but for five or six.

The Peace River outlet has been promised by the leaders of the two great parties in every election since 1924—definitely in 1925 and 1926 as well as in 1930, and also in this house. We have had surveys made of every available route. I do not believe there was ever any piece of projected railway better planned or with regard to which there was fuller investigation than in connection with the Peace River outlet. We have had almost continuous surveys since 1922. A few years ago the Canadian Pacific Railway made an airplane survey of every pass north from Yellowhead pass to the boundary of Alaska; I believe that every tree, every mound and every possible route westward to the Pacific is well known. If there is any merit in the matter of planning, in planned economy with respect to railway construction, I do not think there was ever a railway that was planned with more knowledge of all the facts than is available in connection with the Peace River outlet.

The recommendations of the engineers who have investigated this matter have been rather discouraging, I will admit. I remember in 1926 they told us of the millions we should lose if we built the outlet—possibly a million a year. They implied at least that the Edmonton Dunvegan would never pay, and that if the outlet were built the Edmonton Dunvegan would be ruined. I do not know of a single solitary statement made by the engineers regarding the possibility of the Dunvegan paying, or regarding the possible development of the Peace River, that has not been proved wrong in the intervening years. The Dunvegan railway paid in 1927 and I will claim this—and it is true, as the figures will show—that notwithstanding the recession in railway earnings since 1927, the operating ratio of the railway serving the Peace River country shows a more favourable result than do the railways throughout the rest of Canada to-day.