

The Address—Mr. Coldwell

nearly as bad as the droughts prior to 1858. The records of the trees and of other kinds indicate clearly that from time to time the prairies provinces, particularly that part known as the Palliser triangle, have been subject and will be subject to drought conditions.

Yet in that same Palliser triangle there are two mighty rivers, the North Saskatchewan and the South Saskatchewan, one touching the north and the other cutting across the triangle to the south. In those days of great drought, as the minister and other hon. members from the prairie provinces know, when the land was parched there were millions of cubic feet of water running down those rivers wastefully to lake Winnipeg and on to the sea.

I want to emphasize something the minister said the other evening. He said that the drought conditions that existed from 1930 to 1938 had cost this country \$186 million. We are now discussing the building of a dam across the South Saskatchewan river and this, together with at least some of the channels to convey water on to some of the land, will cost approximately \$100 million. I say that that is one of the best investments Canada could make. It is one of the best premiums we could pay against the time when we may have to face another drought comparable to that which faced us in the 1930's. It may not come for ten, fifteen or twenty years, but those who have lived on the prairies for fifty or sixty years know that these periods do come.

I remember quite well losing my way one night when driving across the prairies in the constituency represented by the hon. member for Moose Mountain (Mr. Smith). I came to a stone house where I was given shelter for the night by a Mr. Warner who has since passed away. This was during the drought period and in the course of our conversation he told me that shortly after he had established himself on that land, in the early 1880's, a man drove up one night and stayed overnight with him.

There was a pretty dry period at that time and this visitor said that many years before he had camped right in the middle of the nearby lake. Mr. Warner said that that was impossible. The visitor said, "You may think it is impossible, but I did camp right in the middle of the lake and I will show you". It was a bright morning, the water was clear, and they rowed out into the lake and they could see that the bottom was covered with stumps and roots of trees. There was at least some evidence to show that there had been many years before a prolonged drought when

it seemed some bush had grown in what had been the bottom of a dry lake, but that once more water came with wetter years. I say that the South Saskatchewan river scheme is most necessary, and at the same time may become one of the most profitable investments that this country has ever made. I should like to quote from what I said on a former occasion, as recorded at page 638 of *Hansard* of February 21, 1938, as follows:

Hence it is not a question of large quantities of water, but of being able to deliver at the right time to the growing crops the comparatively small amount of water often required. For this purpose I believe there is sufficient water in the rivers and streams of western Canada.

I went on to say:

A friend of mine last summer, when the days were hot, stood near Saskatchewan Landing—

That is where the bridge has recently been built.

—and watched the South Saskatchewan, incidentally lower than usual, roll by. He told me that the river was in flood—not a great flood such as we have known in the past, but comparatively in flood—at a much higher level than normal last year, and flowing at about eight miles per hour in a channel one quarter of a mile wide. He estimated that if the water were diverted it would cover many sections of land one foot deep within twenty-four hours.

I do not think you need water one foot deep, but he was computing it on the flow of the water and the level of the land in the plain at that point. I continue:

Mr. Stirling: What month was that?

Mr. Coldwell: That was in July. I do not know how correct that estimate is, but I do know that vast quantities of water are flowing through the parched lands both from the North and South Saskatchewan rivers to the Arctic seas without being utilized in any way whatever.

I went on to say:

I have endeavoured to discuss these matters with engineers and others who have looked into the problem; I have gone carefully over the contour maps of the dried-out area, and as a layman I would say that wide-scale irrigation seems to present no insuperable difficulties, either physical or financial, on the northern side of the Missouri-Coteau divide.

Then, as the minister said of it the other day, I made this remark:

The valleys of both the Saskatchewan rivers lie between great banks and there are several places where dams could be conveniently located and power generated if desired. If it were necessary to divert some water from the North to the South Saskatchewan river—

That is what the old Pearce plan suggested.—and to supplement the latter, irrigating the intervening country as it flowed, I believe that could be done.

I am not saying that would be something we should or could undertake at the present time. I want to say to the house that I believed at that time and I am still persuaded