

Western Agricultural Problems

By CHARLES A. DUNNING

Manager Saskatchewan Co-operative Elevator Co., before the C.M.A. Convention in Montreal on June 10

In discussing Western agricultural problems, one has to cover a very wide field; so I have determined, rather than weary you with details and statistics, to lay before you the situation in which we have found ourselves as an agricultural community in Saskatchewan, more particularly during the last few years. It became apparent some three or four years ago that our people were leaving the land and that our newcomers were not going on the land to the same extent that they had previously done. Thinking men throughout the West took cognizance of this fact. The tendency grew to such an extent that last year the Provincial Government of Saskatchewan thought it was time that the causes for this should be investigated. They appointed a commission to investigate agricultural conditions generally, grain markets, agricultural credits, and in short everything affecting the welfare of the farmer or the farms. I was a member of that commission. It reported just a few months ago to the Provincial Government and I would like to recommend the secretary of the Canadian Manufacturers' Association to obtain for the benefit of the members of this organization copies of that report in order that Canadian manufacturers may really understand the West. It is important that the Grain Growers' Association in the West should really understand the East, and it is also of the utmost importance that you gentlemen should understand the West. Make no mistake about it, we do not understand one another as much as we ought to in these days.

Does Not Pay Well

The Commission found that agriculture at the present time in the Province of Saskatchewan is not sufficiently remunerative and not sufficiently attractive to keep the people on the land and to take to the land those immigrants that come to our Western provinces. The remuneration of the farmer we found has been steadily decreasing, due to two principal causes. The first is the increased cost of production, the increase in the cost of practically all of the elements which enter into the production of grain particularly. The second great cause is the increased cost to the farmer of getting his product to the ultimate market, which, in the case of grain, of course, is Europe. As a matter of fact the price to the farmer of all grain which is used for home consumption here in this country, is set by the price of our export grain, for the reason that the bulk of our grain is exported at the present time. We found that the cost of the elements entering into production had increased slightly over twelve per cent. since the year 1909. The increase in the cost of exporting the grain to its ultimate market in the same period was over 14 per cent. In that connection we are face to face with a very serious situation. The Saskatchewan farmer is in a more unfavorable position in relation to his ultimate market than any other grain grower for export in the world. Just think of the

route over which his grain has to travel, think of the number of times it has to be transferred from rail to lake, from lake again to rail, possibly to lake again on occasion, and then to ocean, all of which is expensive, uneconomic, needing to be developed, needing to be improved. The Argentine farmer, one of our greatest competitors, grows his grain within a few hundred miles of one of the world's greatest rivers; cheap water transportation is available to him at a very short distance from his farm. Australia, one of our greatest potential competitors, not yet producing a very great quantity of wheat, but with possibilities for the future, produces all her wheat around the seacoast within easy distance of cheap water transportation. Russia, one of the greatest wheat producing countries in the world, has a great home consuming population, great rivers, cheap labor. The United States has a great home market, particularly for that class of wheat which we in the West produce. That is the position of the western farmer in relation to his competitors, and remember, they are competing with him on the freest market in the world, the Old Country market, the British market.

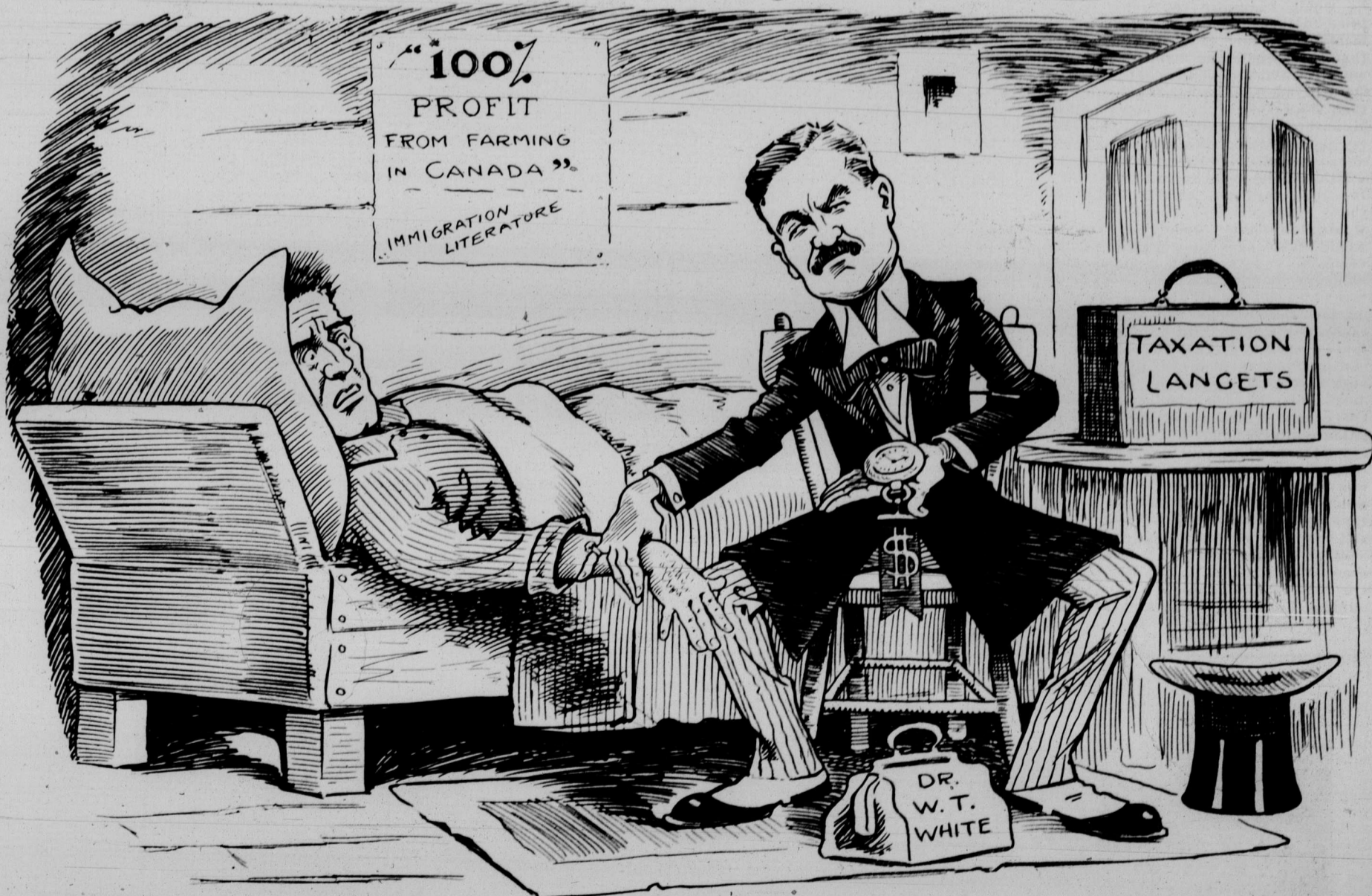
These two increases, the increase, first, in the cost of production, second, in the cost of transportation, has brought the cost of production very perilously close to the net price received by the farmer for his grain. The conditions are such that grain growing is not sufficiently remunerative at the

present time and under the present conditions.

Mixed Farming

You will expect me to deal, I am sure, with the question of better farming, or mixed farming. In relation to this question we are constantly receiving advice. I think every commercial traveller in Western Canada, and I am sure every banker, and he may only be twenty years of age, and never have been on a farm, or if he has, he got off it pretty quickly, this class of men, in addition to the men who do understand farming, are constantly advising us to go in for mixed farming. In connection with grain growing alone, the condition has arrived where a man must grow at least twenty bushels per acre of Number 2 Northern Wheat in order to make ends meet; that is, under conditions as they existed during the years 1909 to 1913. I am a mixed farmer. I do grow, in addition to wheat, oats, barley, and I raise horses and cattle and anything else that will grow on the farm profitably. I study the cost of operation in relation to my own business just the same as a manufacturer does in making his product. But, my farm is situated in one of those districts in Saskatchewan which is peculiarly adapted for mixed farming, plenty of shelter, parklike country, dotted with bluffs. Many of you have seen the country, which has plenty of water. Let me tell you that over a large portion of the prairies which produce the largest quantity of

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THE QUACK DOCTOR.

Dr. White to Patient (Western Farmer): "You are very weak and anaemic from loss of blood. The remedy for your disease is to let more blood (taxes)."

Finance Minister White is coming west in a few weeks, and, before his western tour is over, he will see that his plan of taxing the farmer for the benefit of the manufacturer is disastrous to the West.