

The Address—Mr. Diefenbaker

In the British House of Commons there is a public accounts committee, a replica of which I should like to see established here. On that committee the majority are not members supporting the government, but they are opposition members. The chairman is not appointed by the government, but it is a member of an opposition party appointed by the members of the committee. Such a committee operates for the purpose of assuring that maximum results shall be secured for all expenditures made. I bring this to the attention of the government; for, sir, if expenditures are being made economically, and if there is nothing to hide, such a committee could not find any over- or mis-expenditure. I suggest that such a public accounts committee be convened. We cannot go on increasing expenditures year by year with parliament having merely a passing acquaintance with them and with no knowledge whatsoever as to whether or not economies are being practised.

I shall now touch on matters of particular interest to Saskatchewan and to the western provinces and of national importance as well. The new members from the province of Saskatchewan who have spoken so far have brought to the house a breadth of purpose that has appealed to all of us. Hon. members from that province are united on certain things. Mention was made before the orders of the day were called by you, Mr. Speaker, of the matter of depreciation for income tax purposes. I say to the Minister of National Revenue (Mr. McCann) that never before has that department been as efficient in the forcing of people to pay and in following them up as it is today. It has been so efficient that injustices have crept in; it has been so forceful that in a number of instances the actions taken have been hard to understand.

Recently a regulation as to maximum rates of depreciation allowable for income tax purposes was sent out by the department. I ask the minister, in the light of experience, to reconsider the rates. In considerable measure the farmers in my constituency are power farmers. They have written me about the rates of depreciation, which are as follows: combines, self-propelled, 15 per cent; combines, 10 per cent; sleighs, 15 per cent; swathers, 10 per cent; tillers, 10 per cent; tractors, trailers, trucks and wagons, 15 per cent. A number have suggested to me that the changes are almost incredibly stupid and the reasons for some rates are difficult to understand. Automobiles, self-propelled combines, tractors and trucks have been reduced from 20 per cent to 15 per cent. Sleighs, wagons and trailers have been raised from 10 per cent to 15 per cent. The maximum on swathers and one-way disc seeders is only 10 per cent. In

view of the rapid rate of depreciation of this machinery and equipment, changes should be made in these rates in order to meet practical conditions. All hon. members from the western provinces will support this request, I trust, and we should be supported by hon. members from other provinces and wherever power machinery is used.

Mr. McCann: May I interject a remark? I ask the hon. member's pardon for doing so. We realize that the rates will have to be adjusted from time to time in the light of experience which we gain with reference to the life of these particular implements that are used.

Mr. Diefenbaker: I thank the hon. gentleman. It is with the realization of that fact that I bring these matters to the attention of the house. I hope the minister will act soon, because there is a considerable amount of complaint that the present rates do not operate in justice to the farmer.

I wish to refer now to freight rates. Generally speaking, so far as the western members are concerned, there should be a request on their part that the increases recently allowed by the board of transport commissioners be held back by the cabinet until such time as the discrimination and discriminatory rates now in effect against western Canada and other parts of the country are removed. I do not suggest a permanent hold-up, because all of us realize that there must be an increase in freight rates to meet the added costs of operating railroads if that is established to the satisfaction of the commission. The recent increases if allowed will accentuate that discrimination that now prevails.

Another matter to which I wish to refer is the protection accorded to statutory freight rates under the Crowsnest pass rates. Attacks are being made on these rates. Without regard to party considerations, I feel that every western member should rise in his place in this house and demand that those rates be not interfered with. If they are interfered with; if they are raised, it will impose upon the western farmers a tremendous additional and a correspondingly large reduction in the amount of the farmer's income on his grain crops.

Under the Crowsnest pass rates the average freight rate in Saskatchewan is 13 cents a bushel. That rate would be approximately doubled. So far as the Saskatchewan wheat pool is concerned it would mean that the freight bill would be increased to approximately \$41,236,000, or almost double what it was last year. The western farmers have a right to demand that these Crowsnest pass