

STORMS

WINNIPEG, MAN.—REQUEST FOR ASSISTANCE

On the orders of the day:

Mr. Stanley Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Prime Minister and it arises out of the answer just given by the Minister of Finance. In view of the very heavy costs being faced by Winnipeg and its environs as a result of the unprecedented storm over the week end, will the government consider making an offer to assist in paying these costs?

Right Hon. L. B. Pearson (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, my hon. friend of course knows the normal procedure in these matters is for the municipalities to get in touch with the federal government first.

SUPPLY

The house in committee of supply, Mr. Batten in the chair.

DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

Legal and other services—

1. Administration including the office of the Superintendent of Bankruptcy, grants and contributions as detailed in the estimates, gratuities to the widows or such dependents as may be approved by Treasury Board of judges who die while in office and authority to make recoverable advances for the administration of justice on behalf of the governments of the Northwest Territories and the Yukon Territory, \$2,504,300.

The Chairman: On Friday when the committee rose the committee was discussing item 1. The hon. member for York South had moved an amendment thereto and later requested unanimous consent to withdraw his amendment.

Mr. Lewis: Mr. Chairman, I would like to make clear, in view of the fact that the terms of reference have not been laid before the house and in view of the time which has elapsed, that my request for withdrawal is, with your permission, on the table until the terms of reference are seen by hon. members including myself.

Mr. Pearson: Mr. Chairman, I will do my best to satisfy the very legitimate interests of my hon. friend and other members of the committee in this and perhaps one or two other related matters.

I indicated to this committee last Friday, Mr. Chairman, that in light of the very considerable concern which has been expressed about the nature of the dismissal of George Victor Spencer from the public service and the resultant denial of his pension

Supply—Justice

and other benefits because of the nature of the action taken by the Civil Service Commission, I would favour an inquiry into the nature of the dismissal, particularly because Mr. Spencer for the first time the day before asked for such an inquiry.

The committee may recall that I indicated then, because all we had was a telegram addressed to a member of the house signed by a lawyer in Vancouver and Mr. Spencer, that I would determine myself—having given the commitment myself—whether Mr. Spencer in fact sent the telegram, although I underline that I had no reason to doubt my hon. friend's word, and whether the telegram represented his view in respect of the inquiry. So, I talked to Mr. Spencer by telephone on Friday evening and asked him simply this question, whether the telegram which had been read into the record of the House of Commons, and his name as having signed it, were confirmed by him and whether he confirmed the request for an inquiry in the terms outlined in the telegram. He did confirm both his signature on the telegram and the wording of the telegram with regard to the inquiry that he requested.

Accordingly, Mr. Chairman, an order in council was passed this morning, the text of which I have now before me, having received it a very short time ago. I should like to read that order in council and then, if the committee gives unanimous consent, I will be very glad to table it. The pertinent parts of the order in council read:

(1) that the Honourable Mr. Justice Dalton Court-right Wells, Toronto, Ontario, be appointed a Commissioner under Part I of the Inquiries Act to make such investigation, as in his absolute discretion he deems necessary, into the complaints made by George Victor Spencer as set out in the following telegram of 4th March, 1966:

"I have had a long interview with Victor Spencer with the approval of his solicitor, Harry Rankin. Spencer wants an inquiry of his case, either a judicial inquiry or by parliamentary committee because he does not feel he has been fairly dealt with. His complaint is with the nature of his dismissal and the unfair deprivation of benefits associated with his job such as pension and insurance benefits. He has no complaint with the treatment he has received from the R.C.M.P. but on the contrary feels they have been most considerate with him. Mr. Harry Rankin has also authorized the sending of this telegram."

The order in council goes on, having quoted the message:

—and to report whether, in his opinion, Mr. Spencer has been dealt with fairly and, if not, what rectification appears to him to be fair;

(2) that the procedure to be followed be in the absolute discretion of the Commissioner, including the power to hold the sessions in camera and to