

S.O. 29

only one proven case of arson in all the fires that swept through British Columbia last summer.

After my discussions with these fire-fighters, I approached the Department of Revenue and the Minister of Employment and Immigration (Miss MacDonald) in the middle of the summer. I also expressed my concern to my caucus colleagues from British Columbia, which they accepted and supported. The Government's response was quick—I would venture to say in the space of two weeks—and it was to amend the regulations under the Unemployment Insurance Act so that forest fire-fighters who were brought on to the fire lines by the provincial departments of forestry would be covered under the UIC.

The only problem is that this is a co-operative venture and that some of the provinces—British Columbia in this case—have not accepted that proposal. I cannot for the life of me understand why it has not accepted this proposal because it is the Government of Canada that is paying the bill through the taxpayers of Canada. Perhaps the provincial Government is concerned that including all of these additional people in its Department of Forestry will inflate the numbers in its books and will be challenged in the provincial legislature for having more man-years than it planned. However, what opposition Member would challenge the Government on that basis when it is clear that the reason for these increased man-years is the need to provide UI benefits for those fire-fighters who are put on the workforce of that particular Department?

In conclusion, I want to thank the Hon. Member for Fundy—Royal for bringing about this debate. It has given me an opportunity to put on the record of the House of Commons the dedication of the men and women who fought those fires last summer, the response of my colleagues to a matter of urgent and pressing necessity, and to indicate the outstanding speed with which the matter was addressed by the Minister of Revenue (Mr. Mackay) and the Minister of Employment and Immigration.

Finally, it is time for the provinces, along with the Government, to begin a co-operative venture so that each province will have the same provision for UI benefits.

● (2400)

Mr. Fennell: Mr. Speaker, I believe the House would give unanimous consent to permit the Hon. Member for Saint-Denis (Mr. Prud'homme) to talk for up to 10 minutes and to extend the time from 12 o'clock to 12.10 a.m.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Is there unanimous consent to not see the clock—

[Translation]

—to allow the Hon. Member for Saint-Denis (Mr. Prud'homme) to continue his speech for ten minutes?

Some Hon. Members: Agreed.

Mr. Marcel Prud'homme (Saint-Denis): Mr. Speaker, first of all I wish to thank the chief Government Whip for letting me join all my colleagues in speaking here this evening. I think it is appropriate that all Members be given a chance to take part in the debate, irrespective of the region they come from, because after all, this country draws its strength from the solidarity of the provinces.

When everybody is happy as they are now in Vancouver because of Expo, all Canadians rejoice. When tragedy strikes as is the case now in the Maritimes, in Atlantic Canada, the whole country suffers. That is what our Confederation is all about. That is what makes us proud to be Canadians.

I want to thank my friend the Hon. Member for Fundy—Royal (Mr. Corbett) who raised this issue, and Mr. Speaker who agreed that it was an urgent matter to be debated this evening. For having spoken to you, Mr. Speaker, I know that as the Member for Verchères you too would have liked to join in the debate and add a few comments to what has been said tonight, but your important responsibilities prevented you from doing so since you must listen without getting involved.

In my opinion, this is one of those rare occasions when I can speak for the Chair and all my colleagues, as they may have spoken for us at times, for nobody can remain insensitive to this kind of tragedy. And I would like to remind Quebecers—

[English]

I would also like to remind Canadians in other provinces that this is the time for solidarity. It is not the time for partisan politics. It is a time when we can show that a tragedy taking place in one part of Canada affects us as much as if it were taking place in our province, in which case it would be a tragedy in which the Hon. Member for Fundy—Royal (Mr. Corbett) would feel he must participate and give his time and effort in order to make his own province understand that there is a solidarity we have to exercise with each other.

I listened to most of the speeches tonight and, because of the hour, I do not believe I can add very much except to say that we must be prepared at all times with all of our know how, technology and manpower to assist when a tragedy of this kind takes place in Canada.

With respect to world tragedy, I was saying recently that we should have a prepared team to assist in the kinds of tragedy which take place in the world and especially the kinds of tragedy which take place in Canada. Forestry is one of our greatest riches. That was said well in the letter sent by the Hon. Member for Fundy-Royal to the Speaker, and it has been said tonight by all Hon. Members who spoke in the debate.

We in this great vast land have been blessed by God with much and we should be ready to help any individual province. We must not hesitate. We must immediately get on the phone and say: "Mr. Premier, is there anything we can do? We are ready right now". Our Armed Forces should do the same, not only because it happened to be an army base which was involved. Our Armed Forces in Canada would be delighted to be on the alert for this kind of tragedy. They could be ready