

ment interfere. Hon. gentleman said \$20,000 was too little. What sum would be adequate to repair the financial losses of the people of St. John? Who would attempt to give it? All the Government could do was to provide, at once, for the immediate distress, want of food, clothing and shelter. It was upon that basis the Government made their subscription, which was not confined to the \$20,000 alone, but which also extended to the indirect measure of relief which had been referred to. The second ground of complaint was, that the Government did not proceed with what hon. gentlemen opposite thought sufficient diligence, in the reconstruction of the public works, and the claim was made that, because a certain amount of duties, an exaggerated amount, would be received by the Government, which would not have been received had it not been for the fire, the whole of this estimated amount was due to the people of St. John, and should have been expended at once there. He would consider first, what the position of the Government was with reference to this power to expend public money in the reconstruction of these buildings. There was a law applicable to such emergencies, but that law was wisely limited in its character. It provided only for the necessity, in the public interest, of expenditure not provided for by Parliament, to the extent to which public interest might require the money to be expended. In the repairing or reconstruction of public works which had been destroyed, the Government was at liberty to proceed upon a special warrant signed by the Governor and brought down to the House. What the hon. the Minister of Public Works proposed to the Government was, that such steps should be taken forthwith, under this clause of the law, as would be necessary to enable him to proceed with their construction in the spring of the year, as soon as a vote had been taken. He took the authority, under this clause, to proceed with the clearing away of the *débris*, with the purchase of a small portion of land necessary to effect a proper reconstruction, and with excavations and making foundations of the buildings. That was all

the Minister of Public Works could do before the Session, and all that was necessary to be done in the public interest at that time. Now, what was the reason given by hon. members for the proposed extra parliamentary action of the Government? The proposal was that the Government, without the sanction of Parliament, should have expended a very large sum on public buildings in St. John more rapidly than the public interests required, and the reason given was, that the local interests of St. John required this expenditure, because the people had been thrown into a state of distress by this fire and they required employment. If he was rightly informed, not only were the mechanics of St. John fully employed, and at high wages, immediately after this fire, in the necessary works of reconstruction, through private enterprise, but they were wholly inadequate in point of numbers to meet the demand. No less than four or five thousand were brought into St. John, besides its own population, to do the building required. That fact entirely displaced the proposition that the Government could have aided the people of St. John by proceeding to erect these buildings more rapidly. On the contrary, in attempting to build more buildings than there was labour for at the time, the Government would have increased the demand for labour, and the wages of labourers would have increased, thus causing an increase expenditure to private individuals of St. John, who were, then, suffering under difficulties and embarrassments quite sufficient, without adding any additional burden. The price the Government paid for labour at St. John was \$1.40, against \$1 in the city of Ottawa, at the same time. The local population was not sufficient to do the work required, and, therefore, there was no reason for the Government to overstep the law and impose an additional difficulty on private individuals, who were, already, sufficiently embarrassed, in order to precipitate the erection of these public buildings.

MR. PALMER said that, although fires were, unfortunately, very common, the one at St. John was of such