

S.O. 29

Eel River, Kouchbouquac Park, Carrigan, and the list goes on and on.

There was devastation, the loss of future income that was affected by this, not just the private woodlot owners, and, indeed, that is a serious consideration, but also the angling, the camps, the outriggers, the Tabusintac River where so many camps were lost, and these people depend on that kind of livelihood at this time of year for the sports fishermen who come to that particular area. It is very, very difficult to assess in dollars what the total impact and loss will be to them individually and collectively. A lot of the fowl and wildlife was also affected.

I know the Minister of State for Forestry (Mr. Merrithew) would like to be here to participate in this debate. I know how close he is to the forestry, not only through the entire country, the province, but in my particular riding. He is in Scandinavia on important business.

The warm response received by the Associate Minister of National Defence (Mr. Andre) from all Members of the House will be noted when he said, in conjunction with the statement about the fire at Gagetown, that after the findings of the board of inquiry compensation for those affected would be dealt with expeditiously and with generosity. In that regard I would hope that in the Government's generosity the same consideration and assistance will be forthcoming to those in the rest of the province. The Government has concern and compassion for the people.

In closing, I would like to say that it was heartening to see not only the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney), but six or seven other Ministers in the House. Much has been said about the lack of attention from time to time that the Government has shown Atlantic Canada, and I think in the time of crisis we know who is in support and behind Atlantic Canada, it is the Government of Canada.

Mr. Bob Brisco (Kootenay West): Mr. Speaker, I, too, would like to express my appreciation to the Member for Fundy Royal (Mr. Corbett) for bringing on this emergency debate on the fire situation in the Maritimes. I heard one critic earlier on say that this was an intrusion into Hockey Night in Canada, but I am sure those of us here tonight are quite prepared to speak on a matter of this importance.

● (2350)

Last summer in British Columbia, certainly in Kootenay West, we saw the same type of forest holocaust that is currently affecting the Maritimes. Certainly because of the size of the province, the nature of the terrain and the size of the timber, the fires were greater in their magnitude and their fury. However, a forest fire is still a forest fire and the absence of underbrush, the terrain, the weather and a host of variables can either make it strong or weak.

The fires in British Columbia last summer were uniformly strong. In that context, I want to express my appreciation for the advancement in the reporting system of fires and fire

strikes that have been put in place in British Columbia and other areas of Canada. I want to speak specifically about the sophistication in British Columbia because I recall last summer, at the height of the conflagrations, being at a mill office in Slocan when a thunderstorm rolled in. Within minutes, there was a telephone call indicating that there was a strike at one location, a strike at a second location and a third strike at another location. The sophistication was such that up to 100 lightning strikes could be indicated in given areas as well as which ones generated a fire. It is that kind of sophistication, which can indicate precisely where those strikes occur, that is needed at least to help fight a fire.

The ultimate task falls upon the technology of men, women and their muscle in combination with the experience of foresters and the sophistication of the equipment.

I had ample opportunity to talk to those who were on the fire lines. As well, as a young man I experienced it myself. I spent three useful, worth-while, healthy and sometimes hazardous summers fighting fires in British Columbia. It is an experience I will not forget and one that I am pleased to have had because it taught me a great deal of respect for both my colleagues who were fighting the fires and for the hazards associated with fighting forest fires.

There is really nothing quite like a forest fire. Fire-fighters are sometimes engulfed in smoke. They have to put up with the intense heat and the very hot sun, the dirt and dust as well as a terrific thirst. Perspiration runs down their eyes, and I swear that one's tongue hangs out a yard. Fighting forest fires requires a system of supply to keep these men in reasonable comfort under the circumstances. They need spare clothing and fire-fighting equipment. Such an operation involves a massive investment in order to make fire-fighting equipment available. The marshalling of men in camps must be made very quickly, with foremen doing a first-class job in setting up tent towns, bringing in cooks and food and arranging a supply line. All the while, they never know what kind of fire it will be, where it will take place and whether it will be on such a steep slope that it will simply have to burn.

During that period last summer, in the heat and intensity of those fires, I talked to those men who were covered in dirt, charcoal, sweat and burns. Their first dedication was to the job. It is important to note that some of these men were taken from the mines, the forests and other jobs in order to fight the fires. They did not complain because they knew a job had to be done. However, some of these men had seasonable employment which, in many cases, paid UI benefits. They were put on a job which is described in the Province of British Columbia as a disaster response with no UI benefits. There were also volunteers on that fire line who were receiving UI benefits and others who had no UI benefits.

I expressed the view that these men and women should be covered by unemployment insurance benefits because they were doing honest work in a dedicated fashion. It was suggested that such a step would only encourage arson. There was