

*Interim Supply*

somehow the federal government, under our constitution, reconciled a desire to help a segment of the population who suffered a very severe disaster. Without question, this was a very serious disaster to those who were involved. However, responsibility has to be exercised, in the knowledge that under our constitutional arrangements the provinces have direct and immediate responsibility for the municipalities—indeed, the municipalities are creations of the provinces. I think that a few years ago the position was always firmly taken that it is only when a province was unable, by reason of the extent of the disaster, to finance the relief which needed to be supplied, that anything could be given. That was the original position. I know there have been variations in more recent years, but I mention this so that we may get this matter into perspective.

Something was said of the Hay River disaster. The criteria which apply in this case, however, are different and I do not think the example is particularly relevant to our discussion since, of course, Hay River is in the Northwest Territories and no provincial government is involved. Nor would it be suggested, I imagine by any hon. member, that it is beyond the capacity of the provincial government concerned to handle the relief measures necessary in the case of this particular disaster. The Alberni situation has to be resolved in this context. Bearing these considerations in mind, and not having in its possession details of the damage, the government decided that notwithstanding what I have said it should make a contribution toward helping these unfortunate people. And it made a contribution of a quarter of a million dollars—or, at least, it indicated it would make a contribution of that amount. I believe in light of the circumstances this reflected a responsible treatment of the subject, whether or not one thinks the particular amount was large enough. That is a point which could be discussed at great length because any amount so given is not arrived at on the basis of a precise formula.

Hon. members suggested the sum was not large enough but, as I listened attentively to their comments, I received the impression that their reason for believing it was not large enough did not represent an objective approach on their part but, rather, that it reflected a feeling that the province had not acted as they would have wished it to act in such a situation. In any event—and I do not wish to interpret their remarks—they were critical of the way in which the province had handled the situation. I do not wish to join in that criticism for the reason that whatever I may think of the way in which

the province handled the situation, the fact remains that this is a provincial responsibility, and I do not think it is for federal members of parliament to criticize the methods used by provinces in dealing with matters which lie within provincial jurisdiction.

Hon. members then raised another question which I regard as being altogether separate, though related closely enough to allow it properly to be raised in the circumstances. It concerns procedure for a national disaster fund—and those were the precise words used as I noted them down. This raises a matter which perhaps should be taken into consideration so that on some suitable occasion the establishment of some kind of criteria to be made applicable in these cases could be worked out between the provinces and the federal authorities, to the end that in the event of a disaster the municipalities or the local areas themselves would have reason to know what tests were likely to be applied and how they would be applied. The authorities, both federal and provincial, would, in turn, know in what circumstances they would be expected to contribute and the amounts they were expected to make available. This suggestion is certainly one I would wish to consider.

Perhaps there is not a great deal more I can say about it at the moment because this is obviously a proposition which would have to be considered by the government, and when the government had reached a decision on it the whole matter would have to be taken up with the provinces on a suitable occasion. The hon. member for Comox-Alberni raised this question on several occasions on the orders of the day and he has obtained replies from the Prime Minister. I do not know that I could usefully add to those replies. I think it would not be helpful for me to attempt to enlarge on them, other than to say, in connection with the second point which the hon. member raised, that I will undertake to consider the matter and have it given attention.

I regret that in all these cases it is difficult to know what kind of contribution to make. The hon. member read headlines from newspapers as to the inadequacies of the grant made. I cannot help saying that I do not recall at any time in my political life ever seeing a headline in any newspaper applauding an increase in taxation imposed in order to enlarge any of these grants. It is, after all, a matter of acting reasonably and responsibly in determining what is a proper contribution to make, and it is well, when considering these matters, to bear in mind that the generosity desired by most people in arriving at all these contributions would inevitably mean appropriate legislation to increase taxes—because, of