

S.O. 29

had to land in Ottawa due to bad weather. I would now like to thank the province of Quebec for its great help in this economic disaster.

When all provinces take an active part in this co-operative program, Canada will have at its disposal a fleet of water bombers which will effectively fight any fire, anywhere and whatever its extent. Canada is at the forefront of that kind of control and many countries are interested in such a program. For example, Chili has borrowed our water bombers to control fires in large forested areas in the Galapagos Islands.

The Canadian Forestry Service, through the technological transfer centre set up in Maniwaki administered by the *Société de conservation de l'Outaouais* has now other important tools to be used in fire control. As a result of computerized research, we will soon be in a position not only to deal effectively with fires but also to anticipate them so that firefighters be on the site at the outset.

The federal Government is ready to take its responsibilities following those natural disasters and will never hesitate to support the provinces and protect our forests against the elements.

Mr. Speaker, I should also point out that men and women have given their time and their assistance to fight those fires and we were terribly lucky in New Brunswick because there was no casualty. It is true that some material things are irreplaceable, but it is much more important to avoid all loss of life. Therefore I should like to thank all those who have helped New Brunswick in one way or another. I would even say that the Tory Government of Canada is taking all necessary steps to make sure that the economy of the various areas remains intact.

● (2120)

[English]

**Mr. Brian Tobin (Humber—Port au Port—St. Barbe):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to join with my colleagues on all sides of the House to participate this evening in this emergency debate. May I begin my remarks by complimenting the Hon. Member for Fundy—Royal (Mr. Corbett) in writing to the Speaker to request this emergency debate this evening. It is not only appropriate but gives Hon. Members, particularly those Hon. Members from the forest-producing regions, an opportunity to rise and speak about the disastrous consequences of the forest fires which have raged over the last several weeks in Atlantic Canada and to remind Members of Parliament of the importance of that industry to our respective regions. I also compliment the Speaker on his wisdom in understanding the importance of the forestry sector to our regions and granting this debate tonight.

In my own Province of Newfoundland over the last week, some 80,000 hectares of forest land have been burned and destroyed. Some 300 square miles of forest land are lost to the pulp and paper producing industries of our province and ultimately are lost to those people who depend upon that

resource for employment. There have been equally disastrous consequences in the Province of New Brunswick where approximately 40,000 square hectares of forest land have been lost.

I want to say I am pleased that the Associate Minister of National Defence (Mr. Andre) during his remarks a few moments ago indicated he would move quickly to ascertain whether or not the Department of National Defence is responsible for the fire in the Gagetown area because of the use of live ammunition during the course of practice at a time when no live ammunition or fire practice should be carried on because of forest fire conditions. I am pleased to see he has responded to the representations made by Hon. Members of the House from New Brunswick. The Hon. Member for Fundy—Royal and the Hon. Member for Westmorland—Kent (Mr. Robichaud) have been vocal in insisting that one cannot assign the case of the Gagetown fire to an act of God or a natural disaster. Certainly it was exacerbated by the weather and by conditions. Nevertheless, the fire started because of a decision to proceed with target practice in what were already untenable conditions in the forest fire season in New Brunswick.

It is regrettable that sometimes it takes a disaster for Members of Parliament and, indeed, Canadians, to pull together, but that is what has happened over the last period in Atlantic Canada and that is what is happening tonight in this Chamber. Forest firefighters from the Provinces of Ontario and Quebec have dedicated their experience, knowledge and resources to combating the natural disaster in Atlantic Canada. That has also occurred in New Brunswick where Quebec waterbombers have been battling blazes in that province. It has occurred in Newfoundland as well where the Province of Quebec has provided men and equipment to fight its forest fires. I believe that speaks to the nature of this country. Despite our diversity and differences we can, when challenged, work and pull together for the betterment of all.

I want to take a moment to pay tribute to all of those firefighters, the professional fully paid fire-fighters, the pilots and crews of the Canso waterbombers and the people at the Department of Forestry in New Brunswick and Newfoundland. More importantly, I want to pay tribute to those volunteers who for no other reason than a sense of community and provincial pride, and sense of wanting to protect and preserve the resource so important to the affected provinces, took a tank up over their shoulders and went out into the bush to work at trying to bring those blazes under control.

In my own province, communities were perilled by the danger of fire. Citizens were faced with the threat of losing their homes. But they kept their heads and worked as a tightly controlled unit through endless days with very little sleep. Some of the fire-fighters took only three or four hours sleep over several days and nights in order to battle those blazes.