

*Manitoba Flood*

out to the people affected by these floods. Certainly he had his answer in the statement of the hon. member for St. Boniface (Mr. Viau), who followed him, as to whether or not this was indeed a national disaster. Without equivocation that hon. member said that it indeed was, that there was no question whatsoever of the people of the area affected by the floods finding themselves in a position of being subject to a national disaster, and that they were deserving of the promise of direct action on the part of parliament and the country.

I listened with interest to what the hon. member for Rosetown-Biggarr (Mr. Coldwell) said concerning floods that have taken place in that area throughout the years. I know something of the history of the Selkirk settlement and of the great flood that took place in the year 1826. It was not the first flood on the Red river by any means. One of the greatest, if not the greatest, that has ever taken place was in 1776. There were two between that time and 1826. As to the latter date, the remnants of the Scottish settlement established in the Red river area in 1812 found themselves in a position where hope was gone, but they held on after the flood and in large measure by their contribution retained that great area of our western plains for the British crown.

I was looking over the records of that time as dealt with in Bryce's "Lord Selkirk's Colonists". It is very interesting reading not only from the historical standpoint but also by reason of the fact that it generally indicates the length of time floods continued on the Red river once they commenced. At page 178 I find the following: . . . a worse flood than that seen by the Selkirk settlers took place fifty years before, and there were two other floods between these two. Each year, according to the tale of the old settlers, the rivers of the prairies have been becoming wider by denudation, so that each flood tends to be less.

He says that contributory conditions are:

. . . a very heavy snowfall during the prairie winter, a late spring in which the river ice retains its hold, and a sudden period in the springtime of very hot weather, these being modified as the years go on by the ever-widening river channel.

The winter of 1825-26 was one of the most terrific ever known in the history of the Selkirk settlement.

He goes on to set out the difficulties during the winter before, and then he says:

As the Red river flows northward, the first thaw of spring is usually south of the American international boundary line at the headwaters of the river which divides Minnesota and Dakota. In these states the floods are always, in consequence, greater than they are in Manitoba. In this year—

He is speaking of the year 1826.

—the ice held very firm up to the end of April. On the second of May, the waters from above rose

[Mr. Diefenbaker.]

and lifted the ice which still held in a mass together some nine feet above the level of the day before. Indians and whites alike were alarmed. The water overflowed its banks, and still continued to rise at Fort Garry. The governor and his family were driven to the upper story of their residence in the fort, with the water ten feet deep below that.

The whole river bank for miles was a scene of confusion and terror. Every home was an alarming scene as the flood reached it.

One sees the picture today, an actual repetition of 1826.

The first thought was to save life. Amid the crying of the children, the lowing of cattle and the howling of dogs, parents sought out all their children to see them safely removed.

Then he goes on to say they moved the wheat and oats, what little furniture they possessed, and the necessary cooking utensils. Finally he proceeds to state that floods on the Red river historically from 1826 onward, and also in the three preceding ones, did not finally reach their maximum height until seventeen days after commencement. At one point on page 182 he says:

In seventeen days from the first rise, the water reached its height, . . .

He points out that after twenty further days the settlers were able with difficulty to reach their homes. I point out that historically in these floods, to which references are made in this monumental work by Dr. Bryce on the Selkirk settlement, in every case it took from seventeen to twenty days. If that be so, having regard to the terrific damage that has already taken place to which the minister made reference, surely there should be some clear expression to these people who today find themselves driven from their homes and fearful of the immediate prospect, in addition to the expression of commendation of the Red Cross and other relief agencies. The minister was careful to convey no word of hope that any compensation would be given to these people. He was careful to clothe his words of hope in language that can never be interpreted in the future as a promise of action on the part of the dominion as a whole. Coming from the province of Saskatchewan, where on more than one occasion the country as a whole has come to its assistance, I feel that something should be done.

At six o'clock the house took recess.

**AFTER RECESS**

The house resumed at eight o'clock.

**Mr. Diefenbaker:** Before we adjourned for dinner I had mentioned that this problem along the Red river was not new, but that for a period of two hundred years there had been cases of flooding where Winnipeg now