

● (1700)

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Hear, hear!

Mr. Whiteway: The hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) knows it well. The lake would have the appearance of a paradise, not only for fishermen but those who love to relax and use the lake for recreational purposes.

Within a matter of an hour, the waters of Lake Winnipeg can be whipped up and become treacherous. From time to time my seatmate, the hon. member for St. John's West (Mr. Crosbie), and other members of this House have expressed concern over the capability of our search and rescue on both the east and west coasts. They have a real concern which this government has yet to recognize. On Lake Winnipeg, life is just as precious as it is on the east coast. The government has the same responsibility to provide adequate search and rescue on Lake Winnipeg as on the east and west coasts. On this large body of water of over 9,000 square miles there are only three boats designated for search and rescue.

One problem is that there are many jurisdictions. One of these boats, the largest, the *Namao*, out of Selkirk, comes under the control of the coast guard. Ironically, it is the responsibility of CFB, Trenton. Generally search and rescue comes under the Department of National Defence in Edmonton. However, the nitty-gritty rescue operations are with the other two boats. One is a rubber boat designed for inshore search and rescue. It comes under the jurisdiction of the RCMP. That is one problem. There are at least three jurisdictions. There seems to be a problem with the co-ordination of the efforts of search and rescue. I have requested these papers, studies by the government which I am sure must have taken place, reports, memos, minutes of meetings where they discussed the problem of co-ordinating research and rescue operations on Lake Winnipeg, to provide the critical safety measures necessary to react to the kinds of emergencies that can come up because of what I mentioned earlier.

Lake Winnipeg is a shallow lake. With the western winds which blow from time to time, in a couple of hours the lake can become treacherous. We do not have long-range warnings which they have on the east and west coasts. One of the problems is that the people, both the fishermen who depend on Lake Winnipeg for their livelihood, as well as those who use it for recreation, are anxious about this matter. I do not know whether there have been any considerations by the government, any studies, any meetings, whether those in the three levels of government I mentioned have put their heads together and studied the problem and have come up with any recommendations. The people are anxious to know whether there are any plans by this government to co-ordinate in order to have the most effective and responsive search and rescue that can possibly be put into place on Lake Winnipeg. I submit, Mr. Speaker, that the production of these papers is an essential element for the effective performance of parliamentary government. The availability of these few memos, papers and studies which I have humbly requested the government to put before this House are very much linked with the issues of the

Search and Rescue

right of the public, and parliament, to information concerning the public business.

Before I outline in more detail my reasons for these remarks, let me quote from two of the most senior members of the government whose word can hardly be doubted. Shortly after assuming office, the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) stated:

I confess to the House that in our view—

I assume he was talking about the view of the government.

—information is perhaps the most important single subject which is facing not only this government, but all governments in Canada.

Those are most noble words, Mr. Speaker. More recently, on March 15, 1973, the government House leader stated in this House it was the government's objective to make as much information available as possible. I quote:

We believe that members of parliament require factual information about the operations of the government in order that they may carry out their parliamentary duties.

That sounds good.

That statement is included in the general principle. We are also aware that the desire to make available as much information as possible must be balanced against effective public administration, protection of the security of the state and rights to privacy.

This is the important part.

It is always a delicate matter of judgment to balance the desire to make information available with the effective administration of the government, security of the state and other considerations.

Clearly, Mr. Speaker, members of this House—members from all sides, in fact—will agree that matters pertaining to search and rescue operations on one of Canada's largest lakes is hardly a matter of concern for national security reasons. I am endangering no treaty, no national trust by requesting these papers. But the government is endangering the lives of those who venture on to that lake for work or pleasure by not giving us more documentation as to its search and rescue operations.

Nor is it reasonable for the government to argue that the release of these papers might jeopardize the future conduct of federal-provincial relations, or the relations of provinces *inter se*. I must admit my surprise to learn of the complexity involved, in terms of the various authorities and their geographic location involved in search and rescue operations. It seems that depending on the reason for the search, different levels of government, or at least different departments, are responsible. There is an administrative problem. The studies, papers and documents which I have requested show their efforts to co-ordinate search and rescue on Lake Winnipeg.

If the people of Selkirk and the members of this House of Commons are to exercise any kind of direction and proper interest in this matter. They must have all the facts, or at least some. The safety of Canadians should be of paramount importance to any government. Yet because not all the relevant material is before us, parliament is prevented from fulfilling its role in giving adequate consideration and adequate supervision for providing such an important service to the persons who use