

Manitoba Flood

Mr. Garson: I am glad to hear that. I said to Premier Campbell that when he was ready to discuss the aspect of this matter upon which the hon. member for Souris and the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) have concentrated so much of their energy this afternoon, I would be glad to go out there and take along with me any federal officials that he might wish us to take.

Mr. Knowles: In order to keep the record clear, may I ask if you are referring now to the matter of financial assistance?

Mr. Garson: Pardon?

Mr. Knowles: In order to have the record clear, may I ask if you are now referring to the matter of financial assistance?

Mr. Garson: I am referring to the whole situation, which of course includes the question raised by my hon. friend. That is the situation at the present time. In reply to the suggestion made by the hon. member for Provencher, may I say that we will certainly have any person necessary go there. I told the premier that I did not want to force myself on him but that if there was anything I could do to help I would be delighted to leave on a moment's notice. I am in daily contact with him, and if there is any necessity for that I am sure he will advise me. In the meantime I suggest with great deference that the government of Manitoba is doing a first-class job in dealing with the situation in its present phase. I suggest that, so far as is humanly possible, it is doing everything that can be done, and that there will be plenty of time for the two governments to consider the whole matter when we know what the complete facts are. Some of the facts of the situation will not develop until possibly a week from today. No person will know the extent of the disaster until it is completed. The disaster is only partly complete now.

Mr. Diefenbaker: The amount has nothing to do with the principle.

Mr. Garson: My hon. friend says that the amount has nothing to do with the principle. I should have thought that, in judging whether or not a physical disaster was one of national scope, its extent would have to be one of the factors.

Mr. Diefenbaker: That has already been established.

Mr. Garson: I have nothing more to say other than that, I think, with the useful discussion that has taken place, we could very well let the matter rest in the hands of the government of Manitoba with the knowledge that when the time comes that they can properly divert their attention from the emergent [Mr. Bryce.]

matters at hand to discuss these other important questions we in the federal government will be more than happy to deal with them.

Mr. M. J. Coldwell (Rosetown-Biggan): Mr. Speaker, I should like to join the minister in congratulating the hon. member for Provencher (Mr. Jutras) on introducing this motion this afternoon. I should also like to congratulate the hon. member for Souris (Mr. Ross) and the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) on having attempted to introduce similar motions this afternoon because I think the matter is one that should receive the attention of the government and the consideration of the house.

The minister has spoken of the floods of more recent times, but it seems to me this is a problem which has been before the country for many years. The hon. member for Provencher gave an outline of the disastrous floods that have occurred in the Red river valley for almost two centuries. Prior to 1812, when the Selkirk settlers went into the Red river valley, floods were not as disastrous as they have been subsequently. Those of us coming from other areas are very glad indeed to support the request of the province of Manitoba, if and when it is made, and of the members who have introduced the subject this afternoon, representing I believe the sentiments of the entire house, regardless of party, for the consideration of this matter as a national disaster.

When we look at the history of western Canada we find that there have been many occasions when national emergencies have occurred owing to disastrous conditions, and not only floods but drought, not only fire but grasshoppers. These are indeed disasters that are national in scope. I am not necessarily talking of the grasshopper menace this year in one of the provinces of Canada, though it may reach disastrous proportions. When this motion was moved I slipped into the library for a couple of books, which I have on my desk. One is volume VII of the Oxford Historical and Literary Studies. It deals with Lord Selkirk's work in Canada, and on page 173 I find a reference to the flood of 1826 and to a series of disasters that preceded it. We are told:

The material development of the settlement during the closing years of the Selkirk regime was attended by a strange variety of calamities, both natural and artificial. In 1818, locusts—

We call them grasshoppers today.

—swarmed upon the fields to the depth of several inches, and formed for three years a "sickening and destructive plague."

And well I remember, though I do not have it before me, reading the report made by Mr. Hind, I believe in 1858, after he was sent