

Manitoba Flood

on them, will the Department of Agriculture in order to prevent some tobacco farmers from being ruined, look into the conditions facing these men this season, and, if possible, grant loans so that they may plant crops and reap a harvest this year?

Mr. Abbott: Free enterprise.

Right Hon. J. G. Gardiner (Minister of Agriculture): I do not know what answer I can give at the moment. I shall look into the matter and answer later.

SUPPLY

Hon. Douglas Abbott (Minister of Finance) moved that the house go into committee of supply.

FLOOD CONDITIONS—SOUTHERN MANITOBA

Mr. Stanley Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Before Your Honour leaves the chair there are a few words I should like to say. I wish to do so because I have just come back from spending a few days in my home city and province, where our people are undergoing a serious disaster and suffering grievous losses—even more serious than some of us were forecasting a couple of weeks ago. I have read the reports that were made yesterday by the Minister of Justice (Mr. Garson) and the Minister of National Defence (Mr. Claxton), and I know that the house is familiar with the bare facts of the situation. I shall not repeat anything that either of those ministers said.

I was called upon repeatedly during the days that I was home to bring back certain messages—one in particular—and I felt that I should waste no time in bringing those messages to the attention of this house and of the government. The message in particular was this: Next to the concern for the immediate emergency, about which I shall say something in a moment, the people affected, and those who are not affected but who are concerned for their fellow citizens, are hoping that there will soon be the assurance that the financial aid offered will take the form of direct assistance to the individuals who need it, direct compensation for losses suffered. I want to join with the leader of the opposition (Mr. Drew) in saying that the individuals affected are not just those in the urban and suburban areas who are losing their homes, furniture and personal belongings, but also the farmers of the whole Red river valley from Winnipeg to Emerson.

I realize that the assurance of federal financial assistance has already been given in the house. It was so stated by the Prime Minister (Mr. St. Laurent) a week ago yesterday, and I was one of those who immediately

expressed thanks on behalf of the people back home that the assurance had been given. I must confess that when I got home I discovered that the general terms in which that assurance was given somehow or other did not give the people who are having their homes destroyed and who are losing their furniture the assurance that they personally would be compensated for their losses and enabled to get back on their feet.

I am sorry that the personal arrangements of the Prime Minister are such that he cannot accede to the suggestion I made when we were on orders of the day. I felt it would be worth while for him to make a trip to Winnipeg while the flood waters are still high, if he possibly could. I still feel he should go. If I may say so, the purpose of his going there would not be for sightseeing or making a speech but rather that he might see with his own eyes what our people are suffering. I am sure if he would travel through or over the Red river valley from Emerson to Winnipeg, and get as close as he could to the areas under water, if he could see hundreds and hundreds of homes half-submerged, it would save a great deal of argument when the time comes to decide whether or not financial assistance is to take the form of compensation directly to the people who need it.

I could, like all members from the area affected—and we have all been home since the tragedy has been upon us—tell story after story of young people, people newly married and just setting up their homes, people in middle age, old people who have retired, people at all stages and in all classes and walks of life who have lost heavily or lost all. The spirit of the Winnipeg people is the spirit of all Canadians in time of disaster or tragedy. A great deal has been said about their heroism and the way in which everyone is pitching in to do the things that have to be done. That is all true, but I must confess there is also a considerable feeling of resentment and bitterness at what has overtaken the people, and at the terrible slowness with which some authorities acted in the situation.

There is now being organized a voluntary Manitoba flood relief fund, and the indications are that Canadians from coast to coast will subscribe to it heavily and voluntarily. There are indications that there will be subscriptions from the United States and other countries as well. The fact that Canadians from coast to coast will be subscribing to the fund surely makes it clear that we would be more than justified in taking out of the federal