

Interim Supply

should be considered expeditiously in a conference with the provinces. I do feel that in view of the continuing anxiety and the continuing frustration of the people who were involved in this tidal wave disaster, in view of the very obvious uncertainties in the kind of statement the Prime Minister has made, that it has been done "in accord with principles", this is a matter which should be resolved. I submit, Mr. Chairman, I have tried to express some reasons why it should be resolved in the direction of a substantial increase in the amount of the federal grant to the disaster fund committee before this supply motion passes through this house.

Mr. Prittie: I should like, Mr. Chairman, to support the remarks of my colleague the hon. member for Comox-Alberni. He did take the provincial government of British Columbia to task, and I think rightly so, for their great delay in this matter. I quite agree with the remarks he made as to how difficult it must be for the federal authorities to deal with the premier and government of this province. There was a very long delay before any official communication came from Victoria to Ottawa on this important matter.

However, despite that the hon. member for Comox-Alberni is certainly not overstating the case at all when he says there is very great disappointment in British Columbia generally and in the Albernis particularly regarding the amount granted by the federal government. I do not have the figures before me, but with regard to the Hay river flood a year ago, in which case I realize no provincial government was concerned, and the very serious fire in Rimouski a few years ago, I believe the amounts by way of aid were much greater proportionately than the amount being given in the case of the tidal wave disaster in the Albernis.

The hon. member mentioned in the latter part of his remarks the need for a better method of handling disaster funds in this country, and I should like to dwell on that aspect for a few minutes. The hon. member for Burnaby-Coquitlam and myself received a letter on this subject from the municipal council of Burnaby recently. I should like to quote some excerpts from that letter:

The public generally is being asked to subscribe to a disaster fund established to assist those unfortunate people who suffered damage and hardship from the effects of tidal waves along the west coast of Vancouver island, which occurred as a result of the recent Alaskan earthquake. The municipal council, while not unsympathetic to the plight of these people and the worthy cause involved, feels that there should be some different view taken of disaster area situations generally.

At the present time funds are solicited on a volunteer basis, and no measure of control is specifically exercised by any governmental agency and consequently disaster funds sometimes reach

proportions entirely out of true relationship with the purpose for which they are designed. An example in this country may be cited in Winnipeg where it is reported that a disaster fund was set up for flood victims some years ago and a fairly large sum in the order of \$1 million still remains in the fund unexpended.

Farther on in the letter they have this to say:

As mentioned above, the council is not opposed to the principle of assistance to those affected in disaster areas, but is more concerned with the principle of control. It is felt that consideration might be given to the introduction of a system of control by government, similar to that in the United States where disaster areas are established under the jurisdiction of the government and assistance given according to competent judgment of the severity of the disaster.

The municipal council would seek the co-operation of the members of parliament in giving some consideration to the proposal of the council in this matter and would ask that investigations be made into the feasibility of such control measures being introduced by senior levels of government.

The Vancouver *Sun* supported this idea in an editorial on May 7 of this year. It is a two part editorial entitled "Slow Burn in the Albernis While Politicians Fiddle". The first part takes the provincial government to task for their delay, but the second part deals with the question of some type of national control of disaster funds, and I should like to quote it:

The delay in aid to the Albernis supports Burnaby reeve Alan Emmott's criticism of what he calls the hit and miss system of Canadian disaster aid. Mr. Emmott believes there should be a permanent relief fund in this country which could swing into action immediately it is needed. This seems most sensible.

The Americans can produce millions on a moment's notice. But in Canada federal aid, varying from 50 to 80 per cent of rehabilitation cost, must await the acceptance of the means test applied to affected provinces and municipalities. And public charity—even the \$2 million or so surplus from the Fraser and Red river relief funds—simply moves too slowly to meet urgent need.

It is significant that none of the \$300,000 collected so far by the west coast disaster fund—including the \$50,000 pledged by the provincial government, the \$25,000 from Victoria city and Vancouver's \$10,000—has shown up yet in the Albernis.

This, I would add, was on May 7.

It is understandable that a full appraisal of damage is desirable before governments commit themselves to 100 per cent or even 80 per cent of rehabilitation costs. But surely the two senior levels of government could find a formula for setting up an emergency fund which could act as quickly as, say, the Red Cross. Such a fund could tide over victims while adjusters added up the precise dollars and cents. It could, for example, allow the distraught motel operators of the Albernis at least to put down payments on new furniture and fixtures.

The fact that no financial assistance of any kind has arrived in the Albernis to date shows that the Canadian disaster relief fund, set up by act of parliament in 1954, doesn't do the trick. This fund contains nearly \$1½ million left over from public donations to the 1950 Red river fund.

[Mr. Barnett.]