

*Unemployment Relief*

As the hon. member for Wood Mountain has pointed out, the difficulty in Saskatchewan, so far as relief is concerned, has been accentuated by drought. That condition made it necessary to make expenditures of large amounts of money in that province, moneys over and above amounts which had to be spent to meet conditions prevailing as a result of unemployment elsewhere throughout the dominion.

The hon. member has said there is no control by the dominion government in respect of expenditures made by the provinces. I would suggest, therefore, to the minister that some system should be adopted whereby the multiplicity of inspectors and officials administering relief would be substantially reduced. The hon. member said that the responsibility for the cutting of relief has been on the municipality and that the responsibility for relief measures is that of the municipal council. He very well knows that on each occasion relief is granted, it can be granted by the council only with the consent of the relief inspector, who is the representative of the provincial government.

When the hon. member says there has been no political influence in connection with the administration of relief, all I can say is that in the provincial election of 1938 there was political influence. Men and women in Saskatchewan were placed in a position where, while direct threats were not made, they were made to realize that it would be diplomatic to be known outspokenly as a supporter of the government. To be fair I must add that during the last federal election I saw no political influence.

Mr. EVANS: Where did that happen?

Mr. DIEFENBAKER: I have the sworn evidence, and I shall deal with it, in answer to the question raised by the hon. member. I have before me sworn evidence in a trial in the rural municipality of Fish Creek, situated within the provincial constituency of Rosthern. If necessary, I can give reference to the page of the evidence. Some days prior to the provincial election of 1938 it was bruited about that relief was going to be cut after the election, and relief vouchers were issued before the election and five days in advance of the usual time. Do hon. members know where they were distributed? They were distributed at the polling station on election day, as individual voters went into the polling booth to cast their votes.

Mr. McLARTY: Would the hon. member permit me a question? I do not wish to interrupt him, but I think it must be recognized that the matter of administration is

[Mr. Diefenbaker.]

purely provincial. The hon. member may say, "Well, why not cover this point in your agreement with the provinces?" In reply I would point out to him that in respect of all dominion-provincial agreements concerning material aid, it is clearly provided that no person's eligibility for assistance shall be affected, either through discrimination against that person or by favour, by reason of his or her race, religious views or political affiliations.

Mr. HANSON (York-Sunbury): No doubt that principle is in the agreements, but let me tell the Minister of Labour that it is not carried out in actual practice. There should be a close inspection on the part of his department, but that has never been done and abuses do exist. Make no mistake about that.

Mr. GARDINER: Is not the evidence just recited by the hon. member for Lake Centre the evidence taken in a case where persons were prosecuted for using relief money in a manner in which it was not intended to be used? I understand that is a case where the province was prosecuting persons for having misused relief funds.

Mr. DIEFENBAKER: I think the Minister of Agriculture knows the circumstances of the case. When this government hands over money to the provinces to be expended by them, there should be some system of inspection and control so that we may be sure that this sort of thing will not happen. Referring to what the Minister of Agriculture has said, may I say that for seven long months the director of relief of this particular municipality continued to issue false relief certificates which were made out to non-existent individuals. There was no check-up whereby that could be found out. It was discovered only when the relief certificates commenced to come back from the wholesalers four, five and six months afterwards. The agreements referred to by the Minister of Labour should be enforced and followed up with a system of control by the dominion government.

Mr. GARDINER: What proportion of the money expended by Duck Lake municipality came from the federal government?

Mr. DIEFENBAKER: According to the evidence of the inspector of relief, 40 per cent was paid by the federal government, 40 per cent by the provincial government and 20 per cent by the municipality. Here is an excerpt from the evidence of the inspector of relief:

Q. So that the man primarily responsible for the checking of direct relief is yourself?

A. I would not even admit that.