

*The Address—Mr. Baldwin*

enunciated what I submit was the policy of the government and what has been the policy of governments in the past when such problems have arisen and when provincial governments have requested assistance. This is what he said, as recorded on the same page of *Hansard*:

The policy of the government, as was the policy of previous governments, has been that the federal government should not interfere unless requested to do so by the province concerned. A province would not normally ask for federal assistance unless it felt that any loss occasioned was beyond their financial capacity to absorb. But the federal government has recognized that many of these problem areas do present a serious drain on the finances of the provinces and therefore the government has been only too willing to enter into consultations with the provinces and to reach agreement on a policy whereby federal assistance can be made available—

● (12:40 p.m.)

That seems clear enough. Then later on, Mr. Speaker, on another occasion in connection with the same discussion, the hon. member for Renfrew South, now Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Greene), said, as reported at page 2821 of *Hansard* for June 23, 1965:

I think this is a desperate and dark hour in the lives of these people, most of whom have lived in this area of eastern Ontario for many generations. I do not think these are people who come running to government every time something gets a little tough. I do not think they come to us on their knees, and they never will, because these are proud people. But I do suggest that if we have any function here whatsoever it surely is to see to it that we use every measure and every available facet of governmental action that is available to us in order to alleviate this desperate situation of the farmers of eastern Ontario.

What about the situation as it developed during the election campaign, Mr. Speaker? I am glad to say that the official Liberal candidate took what I considered to be a very sound position. In the issue of the *Grand Prairie Herald-Tribune* for October 4, 1965 Mr. C. A. MacDonell, Liberal candidate, was quoted in these words:

A general survey of the crop situation in "the Peace" will be made this week by O. G. Bratbold, superintendent of crop improvement in the field crops branch of the Department of Agriculture, it was announced today.

The announcement was made by Peace river constituency Liberal candidate, C. A. MacDonell, who only last week had told *The Daily Herald-Tribune* that farmers in the Lymburn and Albright areas would receive federal assistance in the form of cash grants.

The Liberal candidate met with farmers at Lymburn and Albright over the week end and said since then he has been flooded with inquiries from other districts in "the Peace".

This went beyond that, Mr. Speaker. The Liberal candidate, through his office, sent out

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questionnaires for farmers to fill them in, the plain inference being that those who filled in these questionnaires and who qualified would receive federal assistance over and above P.F.A.A. I do not think there is any question about that.

For further confirmation, when the minister rejected the request of the provincial government there was quite a lot of anxiety about it. The same Mr. MacDonell said at that time, as reported in the January 13, 1966 issue of the *Grand Prairie Herald-Tribune*:

My understanding in this respect was that Ottawa would match dollar for dollar any assistance plans, aside from P.F.A.A., as they did in Alberta in 1959 and Ontario and Quebec in 1964 and 1965.

Mr. MacDonell had a letter, which I was told was from the former Minister of Agriculture, containing those words from which he drew this inference. I can only give that as hearsay evidence; I never saw the letter myself.

Then we can go beyond this, Mr. Speaker. In 1957 there was a serious crop situation in part of northern Alberta. All the crops were covered with snow. At that time a meeting was held of a number of officials from municipalities and a wire was dispatched to the hon. member for Calgary North (Mr. Harkness), the then Minister of Agriculture, asking what the federal government would do. The reply immediately came back—and I remember one farmer telling me that this was the first time in 20 years they had had so rapid a reply from a minister of agriculture—that if the provincial government would make the usual constitutional request, the federal government would provide assistance on the same basis.

In 1959 all the crops in western Canada were under snow. A request was made by the provincial governments of Saskatchewan, Alberta and Manitoba for assistance. In addition to P.F.A.A. the then federal government provided special cash assistance and other benefits. Therefore the practice in the past definitely has not been that which the minister has now indicated.

If, Mr. Speaker, this is a new practice, then we wish to know. I suspect, though I should like to believe I am wrong, that there is more than this involved. Almost the same day the minister rejected the request of the province of Alberta his departmental officials issued a notice in which they agreed to pay to the province of New Brunswick a measure of cash assistance to the farmers there. I wonder whether we are in the position—