

S.O. 29

very close to home, we will together find ways to help our fellow Canadians in the Maritimes.

I would be remiss if I did not refer once more, Mr. Speaker, to the volunteers, people in the area who spared nothing to control that fire. Fortunately, the Lord was there, and He told them: The rain must not fall on Quebec only! So he sent some rain in the Maritimes too, which was a tremendous help in bringing the fire under control.

I would therefore like to commend all the men and women who united in a common effort to tackle that problem, and those who helped firefighters, voluntary firefighters. I am certain they were first on the spot. Fire departments. Those are people whose work often is forgotten, and we seldom have an opportunity to mention their involvement in the community. Now we have an opportunity to do so, especially volunteer fire departments who are not paid for that kind of work, who do it on their own. I would like to take my hat off to them, as we say in Quebec!

I am therefore convinced that my Government, the Progressive Conservative Government, will find a way, in consultation with the provinces and our communities, to relieve the burden on taxpayers in the Maritimes as a result of this tragedy.

Mr. Speaker, thank you for this opportunity to express my views in this debate.

[English]

Mr. George Baker (Gander—Twillingate): Mr. Speaker, before making a few comments about the subject of forest fires in Newfoundland, I want to give credit to the Hon. Member who moved the motion and those Hon. Members who have spoken thus far on it. However, I caution people as far as fixing blame is concerned for any forest fire. In terms of the forest fire alleged to have been started by the Armed Forces in CFB Gagetown, I was thinking about the charge made by certain people. It is important that the people affected by any forest fire are compensated.

● (2310)

It is important that the people are compensated. If it means that the Armed Forces are to be blamed for a forest fire in order to get somebody compensated, then fine. I have no argument about that. It is very difficult for the Armed Forces personnel who are using shells that contain phosphorus. It is a constant problem for Armed Forces bases on any firing range. The Hon. Member from the New Democratic Party pointed out that they would make sure the Armed Forces would not fire the shells on fine days. They fire shells in the winter-time and in the summer-time, but that is not important. Wherever you have a firing range, you always have the danger of a fire. You are never certain you are going to prevent a fire from starting.

It is a common fact that if a firing range is used in the winter-time and some of the powder from the shell is smothered under the snow, come the spring a fire will start in that area. The danger is always there. It is very difficult if you have

been fighting a forest fire to be sure that the fire is out. You can dump tons of water on a particular hot spot and find two or three days later that the flame will re-ignite.

I caution Members and the media about fixing blame for a forest fire. It is important that people be compensated for a loss of property or for the loss of forests in an area. The only formula to deal with that in the federal Government is what is commonly referred to as a natural disaster formula.

If there is a natural disaster in a province, the provincial Government puts up \$1 per head of population first. Then the federal Government moves in with about a fifty-fifty split. The federal Government pays for 50 per cent of the additional dollar, and on it goes. It then pays 75 per cent of an additional dollar and then 90 per cent of an additional dollar until it reaches the point where the federal Government pays most of the cost. That is why provincial administrations have been hesitant about applying for money under the natural disaster formula unless the disaster is truly massive. In other words, it covers much more dollars than there is per head of population.

This natural disaster formula is administered by the federal Department of Finance. It is triggered by a request from the provincial Government. The federal Government, to my knowledge, has never turned down any such request by a provincial Government.

Having said that, and having said that it is very important that those who lost property be compensated if at all possible, let me also mention that perhaps more should be done in the co-ordination of water bombers and the establishment of new water bomber fleets throughout the country. As well, Mr. Speaker, perhaps the Armed Forces should examine the possibility of making more use of Armed Forces personnel in fighting forest fires, as they did years ago. Twenty and 30 years ago, as I recall, one of the regiments called the Van Doos would participate frequently in fighting forest fires throughout Canada. The natural disaster formula should be instituted in this case in Newfoundland, in New Brunswick and in Prince Edward Island. As well, thought should be given to greater presence of the Department of National Defence.

I want to make brief reference to the Hon. Member for Carleton—Charlotte (Mr. McCain), who is about to speak in this Chamber in the debate. The Member from Carleton—Charlotte, I believe, will address the Chamber in a few moments and will talk about the cause of forest fires throughout Atlantic Canada. The Member for Carleton—Charlotte is perhaps, and I do not think I am stretching it very much, the most knowledgeable person on the government side in the area of forests and forest management.

Mr. Nickerson: Even further than that.

Mr. Baker: I would say he is perhaps the most knowledgeable person. His knowledge surpasses that of the Minister of State for Forestry (Mr. Merrithew) by a long shot. I say that because I have listened to him over the years in the standing committee. Don't get me wrong, Mr. Speaker. I do not agree