

the attention of the House beyond a moment or two, but I wish to correct a wrong impression that appears to prevail among hon. gentlemen on the other side of the House. The hon. gentleman who has just taken his seat (Mr. Neely) is apparently anxious to know why the Government should have changed the policy they adopted last August. Let me say that we have not changed that policy in any respect, except to extend it in a most generous and reasonable manner. Perhaps I can best correct my hon. friend by reading a letter of instruction to Mr. Bruce Walker, written after this matter had been fully considered by certain members of the Government and Mr. Perry of the N.W.M.P. We had Mr. Perry here, and certain other gentlemen from Saskatchewan and Alberta, as far back as the middle of August, 1914, to discuss what measures of relief should be taken. After the matter had been fully considered, the following letter

4 p.m. was directed to Mr. Bruce Walker, and made public in the press of western Canada in order that every settler in the West should understand the true position, exactly what the Government had in mind in coming to the relief of the drouth-stricken area.

Dear Mr. Walker,—After my consultation with you the other day and our representatives residing in the district which this year has been so seriously affected by drouth, it has been decided that it would be well to divide this territory into five districts, said districts to correspond as closely as possible with the present land agency districts of Moosejaw, Swift Current, Maple Creek, Medicine Hat and Lethbridge. Where it is found that the area affected extends further north than is contained in the land districts above outlined such areas shall be included within the district immediately south for the purposes of carrying out our policy of relieving the suffering and destitute settlers. A supervisor shall be appointed for each of these districts who will have authority to take charge under yourself of the disposition of the supplies to be furnished by the department and to take general charge of all questions as they arise from time to time in the particular district for which he has been appointed. In case of necessity it may be advisable to appoint an assistant to the supervisor in order that there may be every expedition in the carrying out of our policy. This will probably be necessary in the cases of Medicine Hat and Maple Creek, which districts are particularly affected at the present juncture. Under these supervisors the officers of the North West Mounted Police, the agents of Dominion Lands, sub-land agents and homestead inspectors will have authority to inquire into cases and to make the necessary arrangements to relieve the suffering and destitute in their respective districts.

Further, it has been decided that orders for

goods shall be confined to the merchants doing business in the said districts and in all cases purchases should be made as far as possible from the merchants that the settler has been doing business with in the past. Of course it will be the duty of the supervisors and their assistants to see that all merchants shall treat the settlers fairly in regard to prices, and that in any case or cases where any merchant is charging or attempting to charge more than legitimate prices no further orders will be placed at his disposal. It is hoped that by this method there will be no discrimination in favour of any particular individual merchant and the usual channels of trade will not be interfered with in any manner or form.

In your instructions to the supervisors, care should be taken to designate the particular class of goods that will be placed at the disposal of the settlers as well as pointing out clearly to them the necessity of outlining to the recipients the exact nature of the assistance rendered. The supplies to be furnished should be confined exclusively to provisions for the family, feed for hogs and poultry, and fuel. The same arrangements at present in force with respect to seed grain shall obtain with reference to advances of goods of the nature above suggested, and must be considered as a lien upon the holdings of the settler.

I think this answers the hon. member for Regina who endeavoured to raise the point that last year we were willing to take a note and that now we were taking a lien upon everything they possess. This is the public position as represented by the Government and as laid down for the people of the West in dealing with the matter.

All deserving settlers in destitute circumstances are to receive relief, and it is not considered necessary that they must be bona fide possessors of homestead or pre-emptions in order that assistance shall be rendered to them. This should be clearly pointed out to each recipient so that there may be no misunderstanding as to the nature of the assistance rendered by the Government. Furthermore, it should be clearly understood that only cases of absolute necessity are to be favourably considered by our officers and every care should be taken that the action of the department shall be protected in this regard.

Action is to be taken immediately. Please make all requisite arrangements at once.

That was the letter of instructions given to Mr. Bruce Walker as far back as August 19, 1914, and no change has taken place in so far as I am aware in respect to that letter save and except what has been stated here by my hon. friend the Minister of the Interior to-day with regard to the manner in which he proposes, under a certain arrangement, to extend this assistance in some individual cases outside of the stricken area. But I cannot understand how hon. gentlemen opposite should have the idea that there was any misgiving in re-