

*Interim Supply*

Therefore, Mr. Chairman, I am availing myself of the opportunity that has been afforded through the introduction of this motion for interim supply to make some further attempt to have the government give reconsideration to this whole situation and in particular to the matter of increasing the amount of federal participation.

I suggest, Mr. Chairman, that one of the reasons for the reaction on May 14 and 15 of disappointment and a sense of frustration arises from the fact that the federal government, through the Prime Minister and through the minister of northern affairs acting at the request of the Prime Minister, gave an immediate and favourable response to the emergency situation when it arose. Certainly the result was to create an impression in the minds of the people who had suffered, and in the minds of the local authorities who were attempting to bring order out of chaos, that the federal government of Canada could be relied upon to carry its full share of the job of reconstruction and re-establishment when the time came for them to do so. I realize that I have no hope of persuading the cabinet to change its mind in this matter through an emotional appeal, and it is for that reason that I am going to try to set out what I consider to be some of the factual background to the situation.

The response given by the federal government under the Prime Minister's lead at the time of the emergency is, I suggest, a very important aspect of the events which led up to the reaction of anger which has been outlined by the local press and in many other ways. I think it is also important for us to realize that there is a broader background to this situation arising from the attitude of the people of that area, an attitude which I feel is quite generally held. In my view they feel that they are Canadians first, and therefore they look for and expect from the federal government the interest, the authority and the responsibility to deal with emergency situations and with the welfare of Canadians generally no matter where they may live in this country.

This state of mind has resulted, I would say, in a very general feeling that the ideas of federal-provincial cost sharing, particularly as they developed during the period since the second world war, are good. I think in the minds of most people in my part of the country such things as federal participation in the old age assistance program or the trans-Canada highway program are generally accepted as sound and good ideas; and as hon. members will realize, generally speaking most of these cost sharing programs have been pretty well based on the principle of a

50-50 contribution as between the provincial and federal levels of government.

I think I can go further than that, Mr. Chairman, and suggest that most of the people in my area would welcome an extension of that sort of principle. For example, they would welcome a much broader program of participation by the federal level of government so as to ensure that there would be equality of opportunity all across Canada to benefit from the advantages of higher education in this day and age.

I think this question has to be considered against the background of thinking in the particular area of the country from which I come. While it is true that if one reads the fine print in the statement made by the federal government there is some reference to limitations of assistance and federal responsibility which might be undertaken in any disaster, nevertheless the general feeling which the people in my area had was that when the federal government said it was ready to help, and followed that up by sending in immediately, at the request of the provincial authorities, army engineers to assist in the clean-up job, it would be in there with both feet to help on a full scale basis.

There was also a good deal of discussion of what had happened in some other disaster situations. Reference was made to the situations which arose at the time of the Fraser valley flood, the Winnipeg flood, the Rimouski fire, and of course more recently the Hay river flood. In those situations, of which people had current recollections and knowledge, federal participation had been substantial, and as far as was understood had been based upon full participation in meeting with provincial and local authorities and in joining with voluntary contributors to deal with the situation.

As those of us who have been following the situation and have been in the middle of it are well aware, after the initial clean-up period, which was well handled, and after the immediate emergency had been dealt with by local welfare authorities and provincial welfare officials, there developed a long period of waiting during which people did not know what was going to happen. This period of waiting, of uncertainty and growing frustration went on for weeks. This was in contrast to the initial coming forward by the federal government, and I think this period of waiting was because—I think the facts of the situation will bear this out—there was no definitive kind of policy statement made by the provincial government during the early period of the disaster. There was no indication really of what, if anything, the provincial

[Mr. Barnett.]