

*Adjournment Debate*

A great many islanders were seriously inconvenienced for a period of a week and, in some cases, for a little longer. Shortages of utilities, water, light and fuel made life difficult for the people and for their farm animals. There was a threat to our valuable potato crop and to such grain as was not harvested. I now hear less disturbing reports than were coming my way when I first asked the question. Yet to many people this was not an inconvenience of a minor nature. For a week it was impossible to telephone to my residence in Prince Edward Island, as I discovered daily. Many homes were unheated for days. The utility companies moved as best they could to get things back to normal.

My main concern has to do with the alacrity of the movement of aid toward provinces and regions affected by seriously adverse weather conditions. From time to time in this House I have heard members bring forward appeals arising from emergency situations in their home areas, inquiring about federal aid and being advised that no official request had yet come from the province concerned. In many cases speed is of the essence, and I would urge greater co-ordination so that there might be a diminution of the waiting period.

In July of this year a freak storm damaged crops in my constituency. Appeals for compensation were made, discussed and processed, but it was a long time before the victims of the storm were able to receive funds, or even to receive assurances as to the measure of aid which would come to them. In these days it is not easy to wait. Time is money, and during a period of inflation money is shrinking.

It is ironic I should be talking about two grim assaults from nature on Prince Edward Island—strange, because this summer was one of the most beautiful and balmy in the island's history, as many thousands of tourists can testify. I appeal for a method whereby the whole procedure for making aid available in such cases can be improved and expedited.

● (2210)

**Mr. Jack Cullen (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance):** Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his kind comments. One of the things which make this country great is the fact that although there is a problem in Prince Edward Island the heart of the rest of the country goes out to the people there in the disaster they face.

Federal policy on disaster assistance has, since 1970, taken the form of reimbursing provincial governments on the basis of a per capita formula for the expenditures made by the provinces in dealing with a disaster. It seems to indicate that kind of thrust the hon. member seeks, and I am sure all hon. members seek, in dealing with disasters or problems in their immediate areas. But the initiative must be taken by the province to determine the size of the disaster and the kind of assistance that is required, and then it must make an application to the federal government.

There is, however, as the hon. member knows, a formula set up for the sharing of the cost, and the formula is equal to the amount of \$1 multiplied by the population of the province. When the sum exceeds that amount there is an ever increasing formula of contribution at the federal level.

Generally speaking, eligible expenditures are those made by a province for the restoration of essential property of private individuals, small businesses and farmsteads, and public works, to their pre-disaster condition. These guidelines limit cost sharing for agricultural losses to payments made to restore farmlands to workable condition where a farm operation has been seriously affected by flood erosion or land gouging.

Payments made for the restoration of farm buildings and equipment would also be eligible, since they would represent payments made for restoring the essential private property of the farmers concerned. The basic federal measure for assisting farmers who suffer losses on account of damage to farm products is the Crop Insurance Act. This act is given effect by means of the federal-provincial crop insurance agreements which have been contracted between the federal government and the various provinces.

I think it is fair to say that Prince Edward Island has sought advice on what provincial expenditures, related to the earlier storm of July 3, would be eligible for cost sharing. If a similar request is received from Prince Edward Island regarding expenditures related to the recent storm, it will receive prompt and sympathetic consideration. But the initial thrust, as the means of expediting assistance, has to come from the province, which has to determine the size of the disaster and the amount of funds it is seeking.

Motion agreed to and the House adjourned at 10.15 p.m.