

Proposed Committee on Unemployment

I think no finer tribute could have been paid to this side of the house than that at the close of the speech delivered last night by the hon. member for Vancouver East (Mr. Winch), my old and good friend. He told of how, when working on one of the projects on which the present Acting Prime Minister had been the consulting engineer, following the building of a great many excellent elevators, something had gone slightly wrong with the result that some of the workers had to scramble for their lives. And then he told us—and the whole point of his story was in the last couple of paragraphs—that when the emergency came to the fore the engineers did not tackle the emergency as people less expert would have done, but chose to wait to get the facts and then took the necessary steps. The result was that the elevator was stronger than it would have been in the beginning.

Mr. G. R. Pearkes (Esquimalt-Saanich): Mr. Speaker, the vigour of these discussions on the amendments, even though at times they are heated, indicates that there are a great many members in all parts of the house who have a genuine sympathy for those unfortunate persons who now find themselves unemployed. I am sure the sentiments expressed by those who have taken part in the debate are shared by all hon. members, and I think it is a good thing that from time to time members in this chamber should have an opportunity to express their concern over the less fortunate in our community.

The expressions of sympathy and good will, however, will hardly be enough to remedy the problem of unemployment. It was for that reason the hon. member for Vancouver-Quadra moved the amendment to have the whole matter further studied. In times of uncertainty like the present we are all inclined to accept reports that appear to support those things we are most anxious to believe and, conversely, we tend to minimize those factors pointing in the opposite direction.

I am prepared to accept the statement that the present unemployment is very largely, in the main, seasonal; and I intend to devote my remarks to the causes, as I see them, of that seasonal unemployment. I shall offer one or two suggestions as to how something may be done to remedy the situation. Perhaps it might not be done at the moment, because if helpful action is to be taken it will have to be done at once; and the government surely should have had plans to deal with any immediate action required.

Unemployment is seasonal and recurring. I think we should examine why this seasonal

unemployment recurs year after year. This phenomenon should be studied; and I can think of no better study which the committee on industrial relations could undertake than into the reasons behind seasonal unemployment.

The fact that in Canada under normal conditions there is always seasonal unemployment has been obscured in recent years by the conditions which have existed during those years; because since 1950 our economy has been supported by war expenditures, and industrial and agricultural production has been extremely high. There has been relatively little unemployment. When men, owing to changes in the seasons, have become unemployed they have had opportunities of engaging in temporary work of another nature in the off-season period.

But we are told the peak has been reached, and it is obvious why that is so. The armistice in Korea has brought about a lessening in the urgency of producing equipment for that theatre. The build-up in the forces of NATO to prevent aggression has eased the general situation so far as defence production is concerned. There is still a great number of men working at the present time, but unemployment figures are apparently increasing. This seasonal unemployment therefore is becoming noticeable.

This seasonal unemployment in those industries which are important in my constituency, namely logging and fishing, is brought about partly by excellent government regulations for the conservation of our forests and our fisheries. But the fact that government regulations of necessity have had to be introduced in order to ensure perpetual yield and that the forests are not cut down in a comparatively short time, and international regulations to conserve our fishing industries, have forced those men who are employed in those industries to work at selective seasons of the year. At other seasons of the year, partly on account of the conservation methods, partly on account of climate, partly on account of the movement of fish, the men find that they cannot have full employment. It seems to me that when this committee is considering the matter, consideration should be given to measures which could be introduced to offset seasonal unemployment.

Take for instance the forest industries of British Columbia. The cut is restricted in order to maintain the yield. As the Acting Prime Minister said a couple of days ago, modern methods such as the power saw, the bulldozer, heavy trucks and so forth have made it possible to cut down that number of trees which may be felled during any one