

Proposed Committee on Unemployment

problem should not be beyond their ability to solve, because it was only last summer that they assured the Canadian people that their safety—yes, their security; yes, their happiness—could be assured only with a Liberal government in office in Ottawa. I say to you, “You led them to believe that; the responsibility therefore is yours to deliver the goods.” We realize that there is a problem. You knew there was a problem last year when you told the Canadian public what you did. As I say, we the Canadian people expect you to deliver the goods.

I should like to make brief reference to the amendment and the subamendment. The amendment calls for the convening of the standing committee on industrial relations for the purpose of examining into and reporting upon the actual unemployment situation throughout Canada, and for the purpose of making recommendations to this house as to short-term and long-term methods for dealing effectively with this problem.

I take no strong exception to that amendment, although I think it fails to deal with the problem before us and to deal with it right now. We know how long it will more than likely take a committee to act. If I were indicating a long-term plan I would say, “Yes, by all means let us call the industrial relations committee; let us place this problem before it; let them go ahead and study it, call witnesses, call members of the cabinet, call representatives of labour, and go into this problem.”

At the same time it is not difficult to agree with the subamendment which states that there is a serious and mounting unemployment situation now facing this country which calls for immediate action by the federal government to prevent further economic distress. We are able to support that subamendment because we agree that it expresses the fact. When that is disposed of, if it is defeated then certainly we would support the setting up of a committee. In fact if it were possible I would not mind seeing the two carried at one and the same time. Let us have the committee, but let us also let the government assume its full responsibility and meet this problem now, even though their solution may not necessarily be a long-term solution. We might get that from the committee.

Mr. J. H. Dickey (Parliamentary Assistant to the Minister of Defence Production): Mr. Speaker, this debate has certainly served to show, if any proof were needed, the concern shared by members of the government and by all members of this house in the matter of maintaining the highest possible level of employment and a high level of industrial

[Mr. Shaw.]

and economic activity in Canada. The spectre of unemployment is not a pleasant thought, not only to members of this house but to Canadians generally. The memory of that period which has come to be known as the hungry 1930's is too vivid to permit anyone to underestimate or talk down the seriousness of unemployment. There is a saying that time heals all wounds, but the memories of those years are still sufficiently green in the minds of the people of this country to make “unemployment” and “depression” terms of great seriousness.

It is therefore not unreasonable to realize that the appearance of unemployment in our economy over the last few months should create concern in this house, among labour unions and throughout the public generally. However, there is another cause for our surprise and consternation. For the past few years we have been accustomed to an unbroken rise in all indices of industrial activity in this country; and when one of those indices, the employment index, seems to falter a bit it is so unusual that we are inclined to give it more importance than would otherwise be the case.

The position today has been carefully considered in the speeches that have been made during this debate by members on both sides of the house. There is a recognition that the first essential in considering a problem of this kind is to get the facts. Without the facts it is impossible to make a reasoned and clear judgment of the problem. There has been some dispute both inside and outside the house as to the exact extent of unemployment in Canada at the present time.

I submit that a very capable and thorough summary of the facts was given in this debate by the Minister of Labour in his speech yesterday afternoon, and also by the right hon. Minister of Trade and Commerce in his contributions to the debate later in the day. These summaries constitute what I believe to be an accurate picture of the situation as it actually exists. They are the result of a study of the situation not made hurriedly but as a matter of routine by government agencies set up to make these studies continuously, and to report from time to time. The dominion bureau of statistics keeps a continuous check on conditions of employment in Canada.

I have not heard anyone during this debate suggest that in the past these figures have been proven to be materially wrong, and the figures that have been prepared on the same basis as that of past surveys, which experience has proven to have been right, indicate that there are some 280,000 unemployed persons in this country today. The