

*Supply—Labour—Fair Wages*

Now, the situation I will briefly describe as follows. The figures which I give, it must be understood, will be only average figures; I cannot go into particular cases; but I find that in the report of the Postmaster General for the year ending March 31, 1928, the total cost to the dominion for the "conveyance of mails by ordinary land" is \$6,291,180.52. I have been informed by officials in the Post Office Department that this item includes the cost of all the rural mail routes, of all the stage routes, and all the routes known as station-to-post office routes; these are all referred to under one item as "conveyance of mails by ordinary land." Just what part of that single item is devoted to the delivery of rural mail I am unable to say with precision; I can only form an estimate, but information has been given to me that the number of established routes to-day is 4,007, and it has been represented that the average route in Canada at the present time is one of twenty miles. Some routes are a little more than this, some a little less, but as an average twenty miles is supposed to be about right. The average pay for a courier who travels that route of twenty miles is according to my informant in the department, about \$800, although according to a statement which I have received from the Letter Carriers' Association the average amount which each carrier receives is only \$720. I am taking the higher figure of \$800 for a twenty-mile route, which would be payment to the courier at the rate of \$40 per mile over a period of a year.

I need not take up the time of the committee in reading further, but the hon. gentleman goes on to advocate a flat rate of \$70 per mile per year. Then he deals with some figures in regard to maintenance; he gives the prices of hay, oats and bran; he gives the cost of horseshoeing, mentions depreciation and so on. All told he makes out an excellent case for the poor rural mail carrier of that time, and then he goes on to make the definite promise that if the Conservative party should get into power in 1930 they would immediately raise all mail carriers to a basis of \$70 per mile per year.

I think the Minister of Labour should investigate this question and should give it his careful and serious consideration. If he will take the trouble to secure from the Post Office Department the average rate paid the rural mail carriers of this country he will find that it is far below the minimum wage paid to ordinary labourers.

Mr. FRASER (Northumberland): As a member of this committee I feel it my duty, following other hon. members who have spoken and having regard to the remarks of the Minister of Justice (Mr. Guthrie), to bring the debate on this question up to date. What happened in 1929 is a matter of record; what has not happened since with regard to rural mail carriers is also a matter of record. Permit me to remind the Min-

[Mr. Sanderson.]

ister of Labour that we are now living in a new era, that the right hon. the Prime Minister of Canada (Mr. Bennett) has made the statement that the old order is gone. The right hon. gentleman has said that the day of the open market place is largely gone and that the day of unethical practices and unfair competition is past. Let us start from that; let us adopt that new order; let the Minister of Labour see that the Post Office Department pays something better than starvation wages to our rural mail carriers. Let me add to what I have said in connection with the new order, or the old order having gone, that until the government of Canada, the largest employer of labour in this country, adopts fair, ethical business practices in connection with competitive contracts and payment for public service they need not expect any desirable result to accrue from howling from one end of this country to the other that the old order is gone and the new order is in vogue or from anything else; they need not expect any improvement while they continue to set this sort of example to the people. Therefore I should like to suggest to the Minister of Labour that he make it his business, under the jurisdiction that is given his department, to see that the rural mail carriers get a square deal.

Mr. GORDON: What would you suggest?

Some hon. MEMBERS: You are the doctor; you prescribe.

Mr. GORDON: I thank the hon. gentlemen for their very informative replies.

Mr. FRASER (Northumberland): The minister has asked me a direct question, and I feel honoured. Permit me to reply that after the next election the incoming government will inaugurate a policy that will provide a fair return for the service rendered by the rural mail carriers.

Mr. MANION: Just to complete the record, Mr. Chairman, I looked up the motion as moved by the present Minister of Justice (Mr. Guthrie) when he was in opposition. It reads:

That all the words after the word "that" in the motion be struck out and the following substituted therefor:

"in the opinion of this house the present system of awarding contracts for the delivery of rural mail by tender has proved unfair, burdensome and unsatisfactory—"

That is what my hon. friends say to-night.—and that such rural mail carriers should be appointed by the civil service commission upon a permanent basis with a definite rate of pay—