

Unemployment Relief

general in the sweep of its language; it is elastic, flexible, for the purpose of enabling the authorities charged with responsibility under the law to receive assistance from the federal treasury which the importance of the occasion demands. We have stated that the primary responsibility under our constitution rests with the municipalities and the provinces. But because that which was local and provincial in the first instance has now become a matter of national importance, we have asked the people of Canada to provide \$20,000,000 to meet the crisis; and we have indicated that the money is to be expended mainly in two ways: by public works and undertakings to supply work and wages, on the one hand, and relief, on the other, in such cases as were mentioned by the premier of Alberta.

I cannot do more than I have already done to explain how that can be accomplished, and there is no hon. member of this house who would expect me to go into details, any more than Sir Henry Thornton could indicate how it could be done in the estimates of the Canadian National Railways, or any more than in the estimates last year, where we voted large sums of money for general purposes, could it be expected to say how those moneys would be expended.

It is a mistake to say that I have ever indicated that grants would be made. The municipalities and the provinces, apart from the undertakings of the Dominion itself, suggest works into which they have put their money and their credit, which is the best assurance that the money will be properly expended; and we in the exercise of our powers as a national government will give assistance to enable that work to be carried on.

Mr. RALSTON: That was exactly the question I asked: What proportion of their credit is going into these works?

Mr. BENNETT: And because of the representations made by members in this house, some of whom sit yonder, as to the poverty of some of the smaller municipalities and the newer portions of this Dominion, I should be derelict in my duty if I sought to fix a rule which should apply absolutely. The provinces in the exercise of their discretion with respect to these municipalities, knowing, understanding and appreciating the conditions, make application to the government, and the gov-

[Mr. Bennett.]

ernment, in the light of the best knowledge it can obtain, makes therefor such provision as the necessities demand. In the same way, with subways or level crossings, we do not undertake to say how much should be allocated. At the present time it is 40 per cent. We suggest that this should be augmented by grants from this grant, by grants in aid, and that the board should itself determine, in the light of conditions that exist in the community, what contributions should be made to their work from that board. I assure the house that because I was convinced of the seriousness of the matter from what I saw in Canada I believed that this session was necessary, and I have made every effort humanly possible to bring this session about. And in the measure proposed there is that degree of elasticity which would be expected and which prevailed in connection with previous grants. What details had we then? What details were given? Those were grants for relief; certainly they were. What details had we then? It was realized that the matter was elastic and there had to be flexibility in order to make it succeed.

I will not traverse the ground beyond saying that every method will be adopted which the wit or wisdom of this government can devise for the purpose of ensuring that work and wages shall be available for the unemployed under the grant. But where that fails, the obligation to assist the effort of the municipalities and the provinces must be measured by the financial ability of the municipalities and the provinces themselves. They, being under the constitution primarily responsible, must of course discharge the primary duty in that regard.

It is not a question of politics; surely it is something more than that. Surely the suffering of humanity transcends that. Surely we have not gone to all this trouble merely as a political gesture, but because we believe it is essential that the problem should be treated in this way. I will not do more than to say again that I have endeavoured to the best of my ability, both yesterday and this afternoon, to indicate just the measures which in my judgment will be taken; and I repeat that there must be elasticity and flexibility if we are to meet the condition that prevails. But, more, what are the safeguards? The safeguards are, first of all, that no aid is given unless the province or the municipality itself is pledging its credit or money for the work.