

hearing I suggest. If that were done, it seems to me we would have the matter advanced, and no harm could come to any interest. It is not an expensive matter. The committee could be confined to hearing evidence on this point, and could report at this session.

Mr. J. W. EDWARDS (Frontenac). There are one or two features of the Bill introduced by the hon. member for Maisonneuve (Mr. Verville) to which, in the interest of the people I represent, I wish to draw attention. The proposition to reduce the hours of labour on government works to eight hours a day will, in my estimation, undoubtedly have an effect on other labourers. I can imagine that as soon as the system was introduced on government work, labourers working on other jobs would in a short time be agitating for an eight hour day also. That seems to me only reasonable. But the point to which I wish to direct the attention of the House is that this will undoubtedly affect the agricultural classes. It is well known that one of the great problems in Ontario and the older provinces is that of getting farm labour. We also know that it is utterly impossible to have an eight hour day on the farm. It seems to me, therefore, that the passage of a Bill of this kind could not fail to have the effect of increasing the difficulty which farmers now experience in obtaining the labour they need so very much.

As regards the plea made by the hon. member for Maisonneuve (Mr. Verville), on which he grew particularly eloquent, that of giving opportunity to the labouring men to breathe the pure air of heaven, I might say that his argument only applied to a part of the population, because, according to the principle laid down very clearly and decisively by the Minister of Finance not later than yesterday, none but Grits, so far as government work is concerned, need apply, so that the pure air of heaven, though it might be given to Grit labourers under this Bill, would still be denied to any who happened to be of the Tory persuasion.

Another feature to which I would call attention is this. This measure must inevitably interfere with labour in large manufacturing concerns. Suppose it should pass and be applied to government contracts, if the government contracted with a large cement firm for some thousands of barrels of cement, is it not likely that the men employed by that firm would make a demand that they should be given the eight hour day, inasmuch as the work they were doing was to supply a government contract? That is all I have to say in connection with this Bill except this, that I cannot agree with the hon. member for Maisonneuve (Mr. Verville) that a man will do as much in eight hours as in nine. Carry that out to its logical conclusion, and it will mean that

a man will do just as much in one day as in two. In any event there is a feeling throughout the country that men employed in government work, do not kill themselves, that they take things comparatively easy, and there is also the impression that in many cases men are employed on government works a few months before the elections, and employed solely to get their votes. I might refer, as an instance of this, to the facts in connection with the construction of the Newmarket canal, on which the number of men employed was very considerably increased just previous to the last election. In conclusion I would repeat that the passage of a measure such as this would make the obtaining of farm labour still more difficult than it is to-day, and that is my chief reason for addressing the House on the subject.

Mr. HUGH GUTHRIE (South Wellington). This is a public Bill which will have a very direct influence on a very large number of people in this country should it become law, and while, generally speaking, I am in favour of any proposal tending to shorten the hours of labour, I am afraid that my hon. friend from Maisonneuve (Mr. Verville) has gone rather far in the measure he has introduced. During the past four or five years I have given this matter much consideration. I have discussed it to some extent with various representative bodies in my riding; and so far as the Bill is limited in its application to public works, in the strictest sense of the term—the erection of buildings or works of that nature—I think we might fairly give the system a trial and see what would be its effects. It would practically apply only to the building trades. I cannot see that any great harm would follow. In the city of Guelph where I reside, in all the building trades now they have the nine hour day. It is not so many years since they had the ten hour day, and the nine hour day has come about without legislation, and I do not think that it has injuriously affected the hours of labour in the factories or on the farms in that county. In that respect I do not think the Bill will have any such effect as my hon. friend fears, but as has been pointed out by the hon. member for South Toronto (Mr. Macdonell), it goes much further than government contracts and will embrace every kind of contract. One can well understand what difficulty would be created should the Bill pass in its present form. Take a contract for the supply of clothing or furniture to the government. A manufacturer tenders and is awarded the contract. That contract will not occupy his whole staff, probably only a small portion, and, under this Bill, that contractor would have one portion of his men working eight hours and another nine or ten hours. I can see difficulties of that kind, but I would like to see the Bill