

### After Recess

The House resumed at eight o'clock.

Mr. WOODSWORTH: Mr. Speaker, before the House took recess I had been trying to explain that in connection with the speech we are attempting, as far as we can, to present the special viewpoints of the Labour group that we represent. I had been dwelling upon the question of the bountiful harvest, and suggesting that although there have been greatly increased production and increased trade that that did not necessarily mean that the rank and file, either of the agricultural or the industrial workers, had very largely benefited thereby; that very frequently a considerable portion of production was already mortgaged; that very often our system of distribution was such as to permit only a small percentage to remain in the hands of the actual producers.

I should like now to pass to what might be considered almost as a part of the unfinished business of the last House. The members of last year will recall that a parliamentary committee was appointed to consider the question of the minimum living wage. Near the close of last session the committee brought in a report containing certain recommendations, and this report was unanimously adopted by the House. The question itself, however, has not been very fully discussed, and so far as the speech from the throne is concerned there is no indication that legislation with respect to it is to be brought down. May I say that the principle of the minimum wage has been very clearly recognized by the government of Canada for some time past. As far back as 1918 we had a declaration of war labour policy by the Dominion government. I quote from it section 9:

That all workers, including common labourers, shall be entitled to a wage ample to enable them with thrift to maintain themselves and families in decency and comfort, and to make reasonable provision for old age.

Again in section 15, where there is a reference to what is known as "fair wage" provisions, the words used are:

Always mindful however, of the necessity of payment of living wages.

After the war was over this question of decent standards of living was considered not merely by the Canadian government but by the governments of all the allied nations, and in the Peace treaty of Versailles certain general principles with regard to labour were incorporated. I should like to read a few phrases which, perhaps, may bring before the members of this House the broad scope of the agreements which were solemnly entered into at that time:

[Mr. Woodsworth.]

The high contracting parties, recognising that the well-being, physical, moral and intellectual, of industrial wage-earners is of supreme international importance, have framed,—

And so on. We have clause 1, which sets forth the guiding principle that labour should not be regarded merely as a commodity or article of commerce. And again clause 3, which declares in favour of—

The payment to the employed of a wage adequate to maintain a reasonable standard of life as this is understood in their time and country.

I do not think it is necessary to remind the House that this treaty was signed and the conventions were ratified later on by Canada.

The next step with reference to these matters was taken by the government in 1919 when a royal commission on industrial relations was appointed. On this commission there were not only representatives of labour but also representatives of the employers. The following well known gentlemen were on the commission: Hon. Chief Justice Mathers, of Manitoba, Chairman; Hon. Smeaton White, Mr. Carl Riordon and Mr. F. Pauzé. At the opening session, the chairman with the approval of the other members made a statement, and I quote simply one paragraph of it so as to give some idea of the expressed attitude of those who were interested in industrial affairs at that time:

In July, 1917, the British government appointed a commission of inquiry into the problem of industrial unrest, and in conclusion I do not think that I can do better than quote from its report:

"What is wanted is a new spirit—a more human spirit, one in which economic and business considerations will be influenced and corrected, and it is hoped will eventually be controlled, by human and ethical considerations. The main cause of unrest lies deeper than any material considerations. The problem is fundamentally a human and not an economic problem. A new spirit of partnership is therefore essential."

This declaration and the recommendations of the commission were followed up by a National Industrial conference held also in 1919. I may say, however, that practically nothing was done at that conference that resulted in anything of any concrete advantage to the workers. If I might allude to a phrase used by the Prime Minister yesterday, it is quite possible that the status of labour was readily accorded, but labour has not risen in stature sufficiently to be able to take any very great advantage of the status that was so readily conceded in 1919.

Our committee last year brought in a report which has been placed, I think, in the hands of all the members. From this I should like to quote one or two brief sentences. One