

Unemployment

The government is trying to hedge. Yet, during the war, those that were called heroes did not confer for months on end, and look for an excuse, before going over the top. They accomplished brave deeds and gave us our most splendid victories, because they understood the gravity of our position at a glance and felt the necessity to act. That is why they got results. If the government, instead of remaining on the defensive, instead of hedging, had tackled the problem forthwith there would be no unemployment, to my mind, and there would be no need to talk about provincial responsibilities with regard to this issue, or about the gloomy outlook of the opposition, and so on.

I think there has also been a suggestion to carry out public works in order to fight unemployment. This would obviously not lead to any final solution, but might lessen the gravity of the issue at hand. That is why I would like to take this opportunity to point out to the house some public works which, I think, might be undertaken in my county, and would contribute to the settlement of the unemployment problem.

The people of my county, being mainly workers, are much more affected than others by the present serious unemployment situation. I should now like to call the attention of the government to the problem of level crossings in the city of Arvida. This city, which is becoming increasingly populous as a result of intense industrial development, now has to cope with considerable mid-town traffic problems which constitute a public hazard. That is why I urge the government to include in its budget the funds required for the elimination of level crossings in the city of Arvida.

I should also like to recall to the government once more, as has been done on several occasions in the past, that the city of Jonquiere is in urgent need of a retaining wall on the bank of the river Aux Sables, which is used for logging operations and whose erosion threatens both banks in the centre of the city.

There are also other public works which I should urge the government to carry out in the eastern part of my constituency. I refer to the Saguenay river at Ste. Anne de Chicoutimi where, for a long time, a retaining wall has been requested.

In closing, I should like to remind the government once again of the necessity to build the Chibougamau trunk-line, the construction of which is increasingly urgent. It would have the extraordinary advantage of solving the unemployment problem for good, not

[Mr. Girard.]

only for a time, as it would give to a district which is entitled to it the railway upon which its future development depends.

(Text):

Mr. George H. Hees (Broadview): Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak a second time in this debate for one reason and one reason only, to protest vigorously against the casual and disinterested attitude the Prime Minister (Mr. St. Laurent) has adopted towards the No. 1 problem facing the country today, namely, unemployment. When things are going well the Prime Minister travels all around the country making speeches and telling the people what a smart government he has and how well they are running the country; but when things are going badly, as they are today, the Prime Minister cannot be coaxed to his feet. He is strangely silent. He has been asked on numerous occasions to express the government's attitude on this problem and to outline the government's plan. He has even been taunted to do so, but he steadfastly refuses.

To me it is unbelievable that the leader of the government refuses at a time like this to take part in the debate on the most important problem faced by the country. Yet that is the case today. A few moments ago the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Martin) assured us—and I jotted down his words—that there is no one more anxious than the Prime Minister to solve the unemployment problem.

Mr. Martin: Hear, hear.

Mr. Hees: All right. If the Prime Minister is so anxious to solve the problem, then why in the world does he not do something about it? Why did he not a long time ago, as he was urged to do by the opposition—the opposition upon whom the president of the Liberal federation looks with such condescension—call an immediate conference with the provinces to discuss how relief costs can best be shared and how increased public works can be put into operation to provide jobs? But the Prime Minister flatly refuses to take that step. Second, why does he not rise in his place and outline to parliament and to the country the long-range plan which the government has for correcting the conditions that lead to increasing seasonal unemployment every year and to a great deal of permanent unemployment that is also increasing year by year.

If the Prime Minister is so anxious to do something about unemployment, as the Minister of National Health and Welfare has assured us he is, why does he not prove it?