

*Supply—Labour*

on. I do urge the minister to give consideration to bringing at least the other ranks in our defence forces within the scope of this act.

I agree with what the hon. member for Bonavista-Twillingate had to say with respect to the local administrative officers having more opportunity to move around the districts they serve in order to meet employees and employers and so that the employees will have a better understanding of how to complete these forms when they become unemployed and will also have a better opportunity to be aware of the job opportunities throughout the district.

Having made these few remarks, I wish to deal particularly with the question of the inclusion of farm workers under this legislation. I started to expand upon this subject in the debate on second reading of the bill to amend the Unemployment Insurance Act. However, Mr. Speaker clipped my parliamentary wings on that occasion so that I have got to do it at the proper time, which is now. I know that the minister is fully informed of the situation but I promised the farmers of my constituency that I would bring up the matter at every opportunity and I look upon this as another opportunity. I should like to tell the hon. gentleman that I am not in the habit of speaking in the house for the sake of gathering votes.

The farm organizations of British Columbia, including the British Columbia federation of agriculture, the British Columbia fruit growers association and others, have expressed their opinion concerning this matter. It is a problem to the farmers. These organizations have expressed their opinion by resolutions passed at annual conventions year after year but so far without result. I realize the difficulties surrounding the problem. It is somewhat more complex than servicing an industry where you have workers working eight hours a day within a certain area, under certain foremen and things of that sort. I know there are differences but for the life of me I cannot see why these difficulties cannot be met through satisfactory regulations.

The average farmer is placed in an unfair position compared with other employers because when he wants to get casual or temporary help the prospective employee has two choices. He can go to work where he is covered by unemployment insurance or he can go to work for the farmer. Naturally he is going to choose the job where he is protected by unemployment insurance and can earn the stamps while he is working. For that reason, at various times and particularly during certain seasons the farmers have difficulty in getting labour, particularly in a region

such as ours where they have to compete against the lumbering industry, the mining industry and the smelting industry whose scales of wages are somewhat higher than the average. I do think that this matter should be given further consideration and I believe that regulations could be drafted that would exempt the farmer's family. This regulation could be so drafted as to confine the coverage to persons outside the family who were employed by the farmer for particular work.

There is another matter that I want to mention which does affect farmers who do employ persons under circumstances that do not bring them within the terms of this act. I have had this matter mentioned to me by farmers on a number of occasions. They claim that the definition of persons who can be brought under this act when working for farmers is not clear enough. I wrote to Mr. James McGregor, director of the unemployment insurance commission, in connection with this matter on March 18 last. He replied to me as follows:

This is in reply to your letter of 16th March to Mr. E. C. Desormeaux, secretary of the unemployment insurance commission, with reference to the insurability of certain types of labour on farms.

Employment in agriculture is excepted by section 27(a) of the Unemployment Insurance Act. However, it was considered desirable to preserve the continuity of insurance for skilled tradesmen who ordinarily work in insurable employment when they take employment in their regular trades on farms. As it is not very practicable for a farmer to arrange to insure employees for only a day or two of casual employment, this provision applies only when a skilled tradesman is engaged for more than six days in any period of thirty consecutive days.

I hope this general statement will be helpful to you. However, it might be advisable if you receive specific enquiries about this to refer your correspondent to the local office of the commission which serves his area. In this way it is more likely that he will get complete and up-to-date information based on the circumstances in his particular case.

My point is, Mr. Chairman, that I have discussed this matter with the local officials of the unemployment insurance commission, with the officials in my own district, and they have said, if you want clarification you must write to the senior officials in Ottawa. I have done that, and they have referred me back to the local officials in the constituency. There is a great deal of ambiguity on this question. I want to suggest that there should be some clear definition as to who can be covered by unemployment insurance when working for a farmer.

I want to know if you can cover a man who is clearing land? He is doing identical work to that of the man working in the woods. He is not regularly employed in the production of crops or assisting in the raising of stock. Can you insure a man who is assisting in the building of dams for irrigation