

The Budget—Mr. Argue

this afternoon. I am sure we all greatly enjoyed the exchanges which took place.

I think the Minister of National Health and Welfare made an interesting and informative contribution. I was pleased to have placed on record the amounts of the various grants for health purposes that this government is now making. But if the government takes this much pleasure in making the grants that are now being made—they are something in the neighbourhood of \$30 million or \$31 million—how much happier would the government be, as well as the members of the C.C.F., if the government implemented its full health proposals made to the dominion-provincial conference in 1945, and provided health insurance now?

I remind the Minister of National Health and Welfare that the proposals made to the dominion-provincial conference in 1945 were of the order of \$150 million annually from the federal treasury. The relatively small amounts now paid in health grants generally show how far short the federal government has fallen of fulfilment of the commitment it made in 1945 with regard to the field of health insurance. The Minister of National Health and Welfare and the government, I suggest, would be making a much more important contribution to this debate if the federal government were prepared to implement national health insurance immediately. A review of things that have happened in the past is all very interesting, but the people of Canada would like health insurance, and they would like it now.

The Minister of National Health and Welfare pointed out that at the dominion-provincial conference the federal government proposed that an old age pension of \$30 a month be paid to all persons over the age of 70 without a means test, and to persons between the ages of 65 and 69 on the basis of a means test. He went on to say that this proposal had been implemented and that the amount now, instead of being \$30, was \$40. On the basis of the purchasing power of the \$30 when the proposal was made in 1945, I suggest that the government should double that amount immediately by bringing the old age pension up to \$60 a month. While the \$40 a month figure is nominally more than the \$30 a month proposed in 1945, it is still far less in actual purchasing power.

Interesting as were the speeches delivered by the Minister of National Health and Welfare and the Minister of Justice, I believe the Prime Minister (Mr. St. Laurent) himself should enter this debate and tell parliament and the people of Canada how the government

intends to deal with the problem of unemployment. What does the government intend to do about the 600,000 Canadians who are unemployed? We had a debate on unemployment that went on day after day. The Prime Minister sat it out, and he is sitting out this debate too. He sat out the dominion-provincial conference, so far as making concrete proposals to put the unemployed to work was concerned. Instead of a full employment policy the government proposes relief. I suggest relief is not what the unemployed want. It is surely a reflection on Canada that a nation with all the opportunities we have is faced at this time with a situation where 600,000 are unemployed.

I say that in the field of full employment no other government anywhere in the free world today has such a dismal record of failure as has the present government of this nation. The Minister of National Health and Welfare said that the recent conference with the provinces took place in a spirit of co-operation and constructive effort, but I am afraid that to the people of Canada the conference, in the words of the Saskatchewan provincial treasurer, was a grand flop. It was a failure. It was barren. Nothing came from the conference to deal with the tremendous problem of the unemployed. I suggest that one of the main things that should be done is for the government to undertake immediately, in addition to a public works program, a program of farm support prices, and legislation that will stop the continuing drop in farm income. I believe the agricultural industry is of great importance to our nation, and that a prosperous agriculture would go far toward solving the present unemployment situation.

This is the budget debate. Many comments have been made on the budget. It was pointed out very effectively yesterday by the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) just how little was in the budget by way of tax reduction for the average Canadian, the ordinary farmer or workingman. He placed a table on the record indicating what a large sum of money was provided by way of tax reduction for the higher income groups. The hon. member pointed out that for a man earning \$3,000 there is a tax reduction of \$14 in a full year, but for the man with a taxable income of \$50,000 there is a tax reduction of \$954 in a full year. A married workingman with an income of \$2,000 paid an initial income tax rate of 15 per cent in 1954, apart from the old age security tax of 2 per cent. Even with the reductions in the budget, even apart from the social security tax, the starting point will be 13 per cent for a married man who earns \$2,000 a year or over.