

Proposed Committee on Unemployment

The hon. member for Vancouver-Quadra indicated that such things as family allowances and old age security payments had nothing to do with unemployment. But, Mr. Speaker, if they did not come from the taxpayer by way of the federal government to these people, the workers of Canada, through some channel, would have to be provided with these moneys, otherwise their standard of living would be very much lower.

As my colleague, the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Martin), pointed out recently, the anticipated expenditure by the federal government for 1953-54 on family allowances will amount to \$349 million, \$345 million for old age security and \$22 million for this government's share of old age assistance, in addition to which there are expenditures over the whole range of government activity covering every department which is helping to maintain employment for many hundreds of thousands in Canada.

I might add that one of the most important factors at the moment is what the government is doing during this session in extending the National Housing Act in order to make available a larger amount of money for housing construction and for employment in the construction of houses. I think every hon. member will agree the government has done much to bring about a favourable climate under which employment opportunities have greatly extended in Canada throughout the past year. The high level of employment has been such that, as far as we know at any rate, there has been little call on the resources of any of the ten provincial governments. As I said when I began, Mr. Speaker, my object in speaking at this time is only to try to give the house some of the facts concerning this situation. I think it is important that we should quietly and sanely look at the facts and, as the hon. member for Vancouver-Quadra (Mr. Green) said, maintain a sane approach to this problem and not attempt to put it on any other ground than a desire to resist hardship that may face any of our fellow Canadians.

Not in this house but outside of it I have lately heard such expressions as "a national catastrophe". What a remark for anyone to make about a nation such as ours, when we have all been talking with the greatest of gusto about our great national resources and about the great enterprise of our people; and I think we have been talking that way with truth. Such an expression is, I think, not only untrue but is one which reflects upon our faith in an economy in which we can take a good deal of justifiable pride.

I am going to admit right away that to those families whose breadwinners have been thrown out of work—and I can speak, for

example, of my own town of Marysville—it is an extremely serious situation. I might refer also to Dominion, the town of my friend the hon. member for Cape Breton South. Those families and others like them elsewhere in Canada have our deepest sympathy. It might become much more serious for those families if nothing whatever stood between them and outright want.

The provinces have responsibilities to help guard their people against hardship. I for one have no reason to believe other than that the provinces are effectively helping this winter if and where they find it necessary.

As I have stated, the federal government has assumed responsibilities in this combined effort to guard Canadians against the hardships of unemployment. It has a duty to sponsor national policies that will encourage a high level of employment. This the federal government has done and will continue to do. The number of people in productive work in Canada today at mid-winter indicates that. There are just about 5 million now working out of our 15 million total population of men, women and children.

The federal government—in fact, my department—has a definite duty to assist in the maintenance of industrial peace in those industries which are national in scope and which come under federal jurisdiction. Industrial peace is, of course, one of the greatest defences against unemployment. A strike not only causes hardship to the families of the workers on strike, but in our closely-knit economy it often causes hardship to those engaged in dependent and related production processes. Owing to the good will and co-operation of labour and management in those industries coming under the federal labour laws, I am glad to say that there have been only three strikes with not more than 2,000 workers involved during the past year, and there are no strikes at the present time within the federal field.

The federal government has a duty, which I have defined, to help find jobs for workers who lose their jobs and to administer benefits, under the unemployment insurance principle, to workers while seeking jobs. We are carrying out those duties, as I have tried to outline. In 1953 our national employment service placed 993,000 workers. Even in the month of December 63,000 workers were placed. As to insurance benefits, at the beginning of this year over 200,000 persons were in receipt of regular insurance benefits. You will say that a good many of those benefits will run out before the winter is through. That is true. But last winter—which is the latest year for which we have the full record of supplementary benefits—between January 1 and