

may occur that will affect the industry, and that they may find themselves out of employment, and that the reserve that they have built up in the form of a small home for their family may be swept out of existence, because they are no longer able to obtain employment in their locality. In many countries this possibility has given rise to the thought that something ought to be done to enable the honest, willing worker to insure himself or be insured against unemployment and perhaps want, which is almost sure to follow, just as we have long regarded it proper for a man to insure his life against accident or his property against fire. There are many reasons why it is difficult to work out a practicable plan, and it is mentioned in the Speech from the Throne that the Government is at present conducting an investigation into this important question. I would like to make clear to honourable gentlemen what has been done in this direction, and what was the instigation of the movement.

Honourable gentlemen may recall that in this House two years ago I announced the intention of the Government to conduct an inquiry into industrial conditions in Canada. For that purpose a royal commission was appointed. Chief Justice Mather, of the province of Manitoba, a gentleman whom we all respect and whose ability we all recognize, was made chairman of that commission. Two gentlemen selected by the Manufacturers' Association of Canada were appointed members, two gentlemen were appointed on the nomination of the Trades and Labour Congress of Canada, and one member was appointed from the House of Commons and one from this House. The seven gentlemen composing that commission made a very careful inquiry and close study, lasting nearly two months, and finally presented a report. They were not entirely agreed; two of the members differed, in degree at least, from the other five; but the report returned to the Government by a substantial majority of that commission contained some important recommendations. I will not weary the House by reading them in their entirety, but will just give you the well-considered judgment of those men, whom we all, I am sure, regard as capable, and who had taken evidence on the subject throughout Canada and made a careful study of it. The report stated in part, as follows:

The chief causes of unrest may be enumerated as follows:

1. Unemployment and the fear of unemployment.

Hon. Mr. ROBERTSON.

Then they go on to enumerate several other causes, and they say:

We have placed unemployment first because we found that there was the greatest unrest where there was the most unemployment. Unemployment was found in several of the larger urban centres.

I omit considerable detail which may not be relevant. Then they proceed to say:

Some of the more permanent factors in the unemployment problem are the seasonal nature of many industries, due to climatic conditions, lack of continuity in large construction works, and the great distance between some industrial centres.

Present unemployment is in a measure due to the curtailment of production in some industries because of the lack of ocean tonnage.

This applied to the conditions existing at that time.

Owing to the unsettled conditions we found everywhere a great reluctance on the part of those possessing unemployed capital to risk it in new enterprises or in the expansion of those already established.

That was one of the contributing causes of unemployment, as honourable gentlemen, I am sure, recognize. Then the commission proceeds to recommend as follows:

Even with the most complete machinery that can be devised, it is difficult to see how a certain amount of temporary unemployment can be avoided if we are content to rely upon the ordinary course of supply and demand. This margin of unemployment could, however, be largely reduced, if not extinguished, by State and Municipal expenditure upon work of public utility. Such a policy will need to be carried out with care and closely watched from the standpoint both of public economy and industrial conditions. Employment of this nature can never form a permanent substitute for that arising from industrial activity, and it would be worse than folly to keep men engaged upon stand-by government or municipal work when the industries of the country were ready to receive them.

That means, in brief, that governments, federal, provincial and municipal, should, in the opinion of the commission, as far as possible so gauge their works as to absorb surplus and unemployed labour at seasons when ordinary commercial industries do not require it.

At the same time it would be legitimate to anticipate to some extent work intended to be done in the near future in order to give employment at the moment when it is most needed.

Then the report proceeds:

But supplying the unemployed men with suitable work for the present will not entirely solve the problem. Before the labourer can be made contented the haunting fear of unemployment must be removed from his mind.

This is something which affects all wage earners, but more especially the casual labourer. He can never be sure just when his employment will terminate and he will be left without the means of subsistence.