

Unemployment Relief

Some hon. MEMBERS: We do not think so.

Mr. YOUNG: He is asking you to furnish the light.

Mr. BENNETT: My hon. friend from Weyburn is coming to the right source for it. I put this question to this committee: Mr. Chairman, is a government, elected by the people with a mandate, to be trusted with the discharge of a great and onerous responsibility under a most abnormal condition, which it did not create, where there were nearly 200,000 unemployed in this country the day that government took office, as much as a statutory body called the Canadian National Railway, to which this parliament has voted money by the millions at the instance of hon. gentlemen opposite, without having such particulars? What is the hon. gentleman prepared to do? I stand here in my place on behalf of this party and this government and say that we believe the people of Canada will accord to us as decent and as honourable intentions with respect to the conduct of the affairs of this country and the expenditure of this money for unemployment as they would to any body that is set up by statute. The hon. gentleman knows perfectly well that in the reasons given by successive ministers of railways as to how vast sums of money might be voted it was not thought possible to designate just where that money would go. If the measures adopted are successful in providing employment for, let us say, 8,000 out of 10,000 idle, it is not improbable that the other 2,000 will be the reactions of that employment be provided with employment without charge upon the public purse. The Premier of Alberta this morning sent me a telegram saying that the press reports indicated that the provisions of the proposed statute were for works only but having regard to the seasonal conditions and the extremes of climate it would be desirable that provision be made for relief on the basis heretofore named. I repeat once more to this committee; in the opinion of His Majesty's advisers in Canada this money is required to meet an extremely difficult and exceptional situation, one which this government did not create but to which it has fallen heir as the universal legatees of the late administration. Having fallen heir to this legacy we must endeavour to discharge the obligation which rests upon us by reason of the acceptance of that legacy, and to do that we believe that money should be available for the two-fold purpose I have mentioned. To

[Mr. Bennett.]

endeavour to designate the municipalities, the individuals, the provinces or the places where work might be constructed or money expended would be to make the whole matter ridiculous. This parliament is empowered by the constitution to deal with exceptional situations, and if it is so desired it can make grants of money for any purpose for which it pleases without having before it at the moment the designation of the particular point at which the money may be expended. Our parliamentary system presupposes that the government of the day has the confidence of a majority of the members of the house, which, under our democracy means a majority of the people of Canada. That is the answer.

Mr. MACKENZIE KING: My hon. friend has stated that when he and his associates took over the government there were some 200,000 unemployed in the country. Those figures were used generally throughout the campaign, but in speaking to this house the day before yesterday he gave a figure which had been arrived at as a result of careful calculation on the part of experts.

Mr. BENNETT: I said that that figure did not include part-time workers who numbered upwards of 25,000.

Mr. MACKENZIE KING: That may be; no doubt there was the same reservation with respect to the 200,000, but the figure given by my hon friend was 117,000 unemployed at the present time. If unemployment has diminished in the space of one month from 200,000 to 117,000 without any assistance on the part of the government or hon. gentlemen opposite, why should we be asked to vote \$20,000,000 to meet a situation so rapidly disappearing? I would direct the attention of my hon. friend to the fact that the estimate which he gave to parliament was that of experts who know most about this matter. The estimate made by those experts of the total number of unemployed during this coming winter is 177,000.

Mr. BENNETT: Outside of part-time workers.

Mr. MACKENZIE KING: Is the amount we are asked to vote related specifically to these supposed 177,000, or such lesser or greater numbers as there may be, or is it for any other purpose?

Mr. BENNETT: It is for whatever numbers there may be and for the purpose of unemployment relief by work or direct payments if necessary.