

Proposed Committee on Unemployment

Mr. Gregg: Mr. Speaker, I can only speak offhand, but in the maritime region, to which I believe my hon. friend is referring, my opinion is that it has been reduced slightly so far owing to dieselization, but not I believe by competition from coal from other areas.

The hon. member for Vancouver-Quadra referred to the delegations which visited Ottawa last week. Members of the government have been meeting a good many delegations during the past week or so on this matter of unemployment. The hon. member referred particularly to meetings with the joint delegation of the Trades and Labour Congress of Canada and the Canadian Congress of Labour which came to meet members of the government last Thursday. We discussed, in the presence of many members of this house from all parties, many of the problems connected with the present unemployment situation. Hon. members know the tenor of the discussions, and I do not think any hon. members present could say that anyone gave anyone else a lecture. I certainly did not. They did not give us a lecture and I am certain the Minister of Finance (Mr. Abbott) did not attempt to give them a lecture. I did state, as reported, that I felt in discussing this question of statistics that while everyone was entitled to his own opinion, our national employment service estimate of this year, listed in our 220 offices across Canada, as regards the number of those seeking work was greater than those who were actually out of work. I believe some of those present did not agree with that, though I think each of us recognizes that we are all entitled to our own opinion.

The close interest which the delegates demonstrated, evidence of which is found in the brief from which the hon. member quoted, is appreciated by me as Minister of Labour and by the government. It is our desire, as it is theirs, that human hardship be lessened as much as it can possibly be.

Some of the proposals laid before the government in their joint representation at that time are already being implemented. For example, an increase in grants to countries that have not the same opportunities for development as Canada. The other representations that they made will be given careful study.

There is no doubt some of the industries I have mentioned are experiencing difficulties, but offsetting these there are many which are in excellent condition, even in mid-winter. I shall not review these today because I hope some of my colleagues may wish to speak later on in this debate on these matters. I would like to say that in so far

[Mr. Brooks.]

as training can assist workers who have been laid off in industries where production has declined, the Department of Labour is prepared to make its facilities fully available. While that may only take care of a small part of the problem, it means that every unskilled worker who can be made into a skilled or semi-skilled worker is almost automatically assured of employment on a year-round basis.

Today there are very few skilled workers without work. Wherever workers are willing to enter other fields of employment, the Department of Labour in co-operation with the provincial governments is prepared to help them acquire greater skills under the Canadian vocational training program. Over the years since world war II some 408 thousand persons have been trained under this program, apart from those trained in vocational schools. It is impossible to assess how much the development of Canada, by this means, is due to the training received by nearly half a million young people, included in which figure, of course, is the great body of young men and women who came out of the services and took up vocational training. At least an equal number have received training in these vocational schools with assistance under our federal-provincial training agreement. This total includes, in a number of provinces, persons who were unemployed at the time their training commenced. Such people are given an allowance for board and lodging in addition to their training, provided jointly by the federal and provincial governments.

I might also point out that the federal government is doing a great deal to provide support to those who are unemployed. The present unemployment insurance program covers 78 per cent of our wage and salary workers at the present time. This coverage has increased since 1945, as the figures I am now about to give will demonstrate.

On November 1, 1945, the total number of wage and salary earners, in round numbers, was 3,083,000. The number covered by unemployment insurance amounted to 2,101,000; the percentage covered by unemployment insurance amounted to 68 per cent. On November 1, 1949, these figures were, 3,688,000 workers, 2,569,000 were covered by insurance, or 70 per cent. On November 1, 1953, the total number of workers amounted to 4,107,000 and the number covered by unemployment insurance was 3,219,000, or 78 per cent.

In the calendar year 1953 over \$148 million was paid out in unemployment insurance benefits, as well as supplementary benefits paid to workers whose benefit rights expired between January 1 and April 15.