

*Unemployment*

Much precious time has been lost by the way in which this government has dilly-dallied, has denied and sought to avoid its responsibility even for calling a conference.

In relation to this problem there has been no leadership from this government. How many members does a Liberal government have to have in the House of Commons, how many supporters do they have to have in the other place, before they feel prepared to give the nation some leadership in the face of a national problem? A dominion-provincial conference can only be called by the dominion government. The initiative must come from the federal level. It has not come. There is to be a preliminary conference next month which will arrange for a conference to be held later in the year. Why was that conference not held long ago? For years, session after session, we have been urging the government to call the conference, but they would not call it; theirs is the responsibility. The welfare council of Canada offered recently to call a conference. What a reproach! This government, on whose shoulders rests the responsibility, as the only government that can call a dominion-provincial conference in Canada, was so bankrupt of leadership that it remained for an outside organization, however worthy, to propose to sponsor such a conference.

We well know now the attitude of the provinces. We know their response. We know the provinces have welcomed with enthusiasm even this belated and tardy proposal that there should be a dominion-provincial conference. Far from having justified the kind of attack that was made upon him by the hon. member for Rosedale last Wednesday, Mr. Frost, the premier of Ontario, has been the first amongst the provincial premiers to call for a dominion-provincial conference with a view to reaching agreement on this matter. On March 2, as reported in the press, he stated to a delegation from the Ontario federation of labour:

Ontario is ready and willing to accept the 1945 proposals of the federal government for dealing with unemployment . . .

The province has told Ottawa this, the premier said, and the Ontario government also has repeatedly expressed the view that any solution to the unemployment problem must be a co-operative one. All levels of government must share the responsibility, he declared.

There is a frank statement from the premier of Ontario. Then let us bring these governments together and work out agreements and understandings. I quote further from this press dispatch:

Premier Frost said that he would like to feel that Canadians now are prepared to put into practice the lessons of the thirties.

It is now time for a concentrated effort by labour, industry and government to take care of the problems which will arise in a return to a peacetime economy, the premier added.

Declaring that no level of government can take care of the unemployment problem alone, Premier Frost said the Ontario government is most anxious to sit in with representatives of all Canadian governments to discuss the problem.

Ottawa had offered as an excuse in 1945 for not proceeding with its own proposals that Ontario had not entered into a fiscal arrangement with the federal government, the premier said.

"We have had an arrangement since 1952, so that reason no longer is valid," Premier Frost declared.

For my part, I say that reason never was valid. Again on March 4 the premier is quoted in a press dispatch as having said the day before:

Unemployment, Premier Frost said, was a problem that was giving him great concern. "But it is not a matter that can be dealt with by any one government alone. If the government of Canada will sit down with the other governments and the representatives of labour and industry I am sure we can find a solution."

Then, sir, in the last quotation I should like to read, the premier of Ontario in a press dispatch of March 11 is quoted as having made this statement:

Of immediate concern, employment and sale of farm products merited early study. These should occupy as early consideration as any other matters.

He is speaking of providing an agenda for consideration at the forthcoming dominion-provincial conference. Then this follows in quotation marks:

"Conferences between the federal and provincial governments should never be a matter of extraordinary arrangement," said Mr. Frost. "They should be ordinary affairs, on a continuing basis. That is in the spirit of confederation. It was this spirit that established the confederation, and it was this spirit that was intended to have been continued."

"If we had a good basic committee, working at all times on the many matters of mutual concern of all the governments, we would need no extraordinary meetings. They would be a regularly planned and expected program at which the matters studied by that committee would be considered, the solutions suggested by that committee would be reviewed, and early and agreeable solution could be reached on those matters."

"We, in Ontario, sincerely hope that this will be the opinion of the other governments meeting in April," added the premier. "In such a spirit, we can move to our mutual benefit. We could establish a permanent basis for our relations. In addition, of course, we must, I think, seek stabilization of employment and reduction of unemployment. And we must solve any constitutional problems that retard the marketing of farm products."

Sir, there is an eloquent plea for a continuing economic committee, a joint dominion-provincial committee, representative of all governments in Canada. That was something for which my leader, when representing the province of Ontario at the dominion-provincial conferences of 1945 and