

Unemployment Insurance

Therefore, I think it must be obvious to every hon. member that any scheme to be effective must be federal in scope.

I also realize how easy it may be for any hon. member to point out the difficulties standing in the way of any scheme of social insurances. It is the easiest thing in the world to criticize adversely, but if there is any hon. member of this house who is opposed to such a scheme of social insurance I hope he will come forward with an alternative to the proposition I am putting before the house this afternoon. Our small Labour group here has been reproved on several occasions because it has been said that usually we have been destructive in our criticism. To a certain extent I may admit that in many of my talks I have been destructive in my criticism of things as they are, but at the same time we have always brought forward some proposals for the attention of this house. I only regret that as yet we have not been able to convert the majority of hon. members to our way of thinking.

To-day we are bringing forward a scheme of insurances which is constructive in its character. We say that in view of conditions as they are, and as they have been for a number of years, it is time the government of the day did something to remedy those conditions, and one way of partially remedying them is to inaugurate a system of unemployment, sickness and invalidity insurance. The government may come along and tell us that at the present time they are going through financial difficulties which make it hard to make ends meet. I realize the difficulty of the government, and I extend to them my sympathy for what it may be worth. However, is it fair that we in parliament should ask the men, women and children who are out of work to bear the whole burden of this depression? I do not think it is. When times are hard we are told that we cannot afford to have a scheme of social insurance, but when times are more normal we are told it is not necessary. So the workers of this country are caught between these two excuses; in good times it is not necessary, and in hard times we cannot afford it. If such a scheme of insurance as I am asking the house to adopt is approved, it will give to men, women and the young children who depend upon them, a certain limited security in life which they do not now possess. It will remove from many that stigma of the dole which they are now compelled to accept, through no fault of their own.

[Mr. Heaps.]

As a parliament we cannot afford to ignore this fact. At the last special session we took out of the federal treasury—or raised by borrowing, I am not sure which—the sum of \$20,000,000 for the relief of unemployment throughout the Dominion of Canada. That is a method of dealing with the question of which I do not approve. There is no system about it; it is spasmodic in its efforts and temporary in its benefits, and no doubt next winter we will be compelled to do the same thing. I would far sooner deal with the problem in a definite manner as best we can. To-day we find right across this country, from the Atlantic to the Pacific, organizations of men and women who have given study to this problem and who are demanding that these forms of insurance be put into effect by the federal parliament. Labour to-day, irrespective of the part of the country it finds itself in, also is demanding that some form of insurance be enacted by parliament. It is rather remarkable, Mr. Speaker, that of all the nations which have adopted schemes of insurance, not one nation has done away with that legislation; in many cases the original legislation has been enlarged in its scope and benefits. Only a few years ago in England, under the regime of the former prime minister, Mr. Stanley Baldwin, the unemployment insurance scheme was enlarged to a considerable extent until now the number of beneficiaries under some form of insurance in the British Isles is greater than the population of this Dominion.

I should like to point out the difference between this motion and motions which have been made along these lines in previous years. Formerly the motion has been to refer the matter to a committee for investigation, but this time I am not asking for a committee; I am opposed to any further investigation of this question. What I want now is action. A previous committee which investigated this question in 1928 reported to the house in favour of a contributory system of unemployment insurance, and I believe the house unanimously approved that report. To-day my motion asks for the immediate establishment of a federal system of insurance against unemployment, sickness and invalidity. There is a difference between that which I asked for in previous years and that for which I am asking on the present occasion. If there are those, as I said before, who are opposed to this parliament dealing with this matter in this way, then I am anxious to know what their alternative may be.

We have a great responsibility in this question and we cannot shirk that responsibility,