

Proposed Committee on Unemployment

During some of those years at least I was in the grocery business. I remember mothers and fathers bringing in and placing on the counter a slip of paper authorizing us to give them \$2 or \$3 worth of groceries for the week. I well remember how often the clerks, when we were discussing the matter among ourselves, mentioned the fact that it was a serious situation when such conditions prevailed. Instead of asking for butter, or even for margarine, they would put down one or two pounds of beef dripping, which was to be spread on the bread for the children's lunches.

The problem exists right at the present time, and I was glad to hear the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Defence Production (Mr. Dickey) at least acknowledge that fact. We have been discussing it from the viewpoint of its effect on the economic structure of our country, but I suggest that there is an even greater effect upon the life, character and morale of the people of Canada when they are subjected to such conditions. The problem exists, and we may as well face it; we may as well acknowledge it.

I believe we must look at it from two aspects. First of all there must be some immediate alleviation of the condition. A few days ago I received a letter from a section of my riding with respect to a young man who is unemployed at the present time. He had been working, but because of his domestic situation and marital problems—I guess he is not the only one with those, though I am not saying that I have any—

Mr. Argue: We are all employed that way.

Mr. Patterson:—and because of the fact that he had to attend to business in connection with his V.L.A. holding, he had to leave his place of employment and return to that holding. Weeks went by, months went by. He made application for unemployment insurance, but he has not received it and apparently cannot. I have already written asking for a report on the case, but have not received one yet. According to the letter this young man has had to dispose of some of his furnishings in order to meet his expenses.

I suggest, Mr. Speaker, that we must find a solution for the problem immediately. Not only must we do that; we must also, it seems to me, lay down long-range policies to eliminate the possibility of a return to such conditions in the future. It has been said that where there is no vision the people perish. I suppose we had a pretty fair example of that in the 1930's. It would seem that there has not been any fundamental change in our approach to the economic problems that confront us,

[Mr. Patterson.]

and we can only conclude that history is going to repeat itself and such conditions are going to return.

I think the following cycle is worthy of consideration. It has been said that periodic lack of purchasing power results in a lack of markets for goods produced, which causes unemployment. This brings on a depression from which international frictions arise leading to war, which inevitably causes increased borrowing, debt and inflation, and to meet these things pyramiding taxation is necessary. Then there is peace, and later a recurrence of the cycle. This has been the history of the past and, as I have already said, in spite of the fond hopes we may cherish, in spite of glib prophecies and statements to the contrary, I am afraid that history is going to repeat itself unless the government takes the steps necessary to solve the problem and see to it that adequate purchasing power is placed in the hands of the people to enable them to buy the products of factories and farms and in order to contribute to further production of the essentials of life.

The situation is there; the problem exists. I submit that something should be done immediately, and that long-term policies should be laid down in order to forestall a recurrence of these unsatisfactory conditions.

Mr. Elmore Philpott (Vancouver South): Mr. Speaker, I have no hesitation whatever in taking part in this debate, although I had not intended to do so until today. The other day the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Drew) was good enough to tell the house that he and I were very old friends. He recalled our days at university, our days of war service, and used an expression which I will use now—this is where I came in. My memory is long enough to remember the great stock market crash of 1929 and the great depression from 1930 to 1935.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. MacInnis: 1939 and 1940.

Mr. Philpott: Let me say that if my hon. friends opposite who moved the subamendment thought there was any chance whatever that the government would be overthrown and a Conservative government take its place they would be in a terrific state of panic. Instead of all the trade unions which support them sending a delegation to see the government they would be sending a delegation here to tell them to pipe down, because the people of this country remember very well what happened in the 1930's. I had the honour to run for parliament first in the constituency of Hamilton West, now so gracefully represented by the hon. lady opposite.